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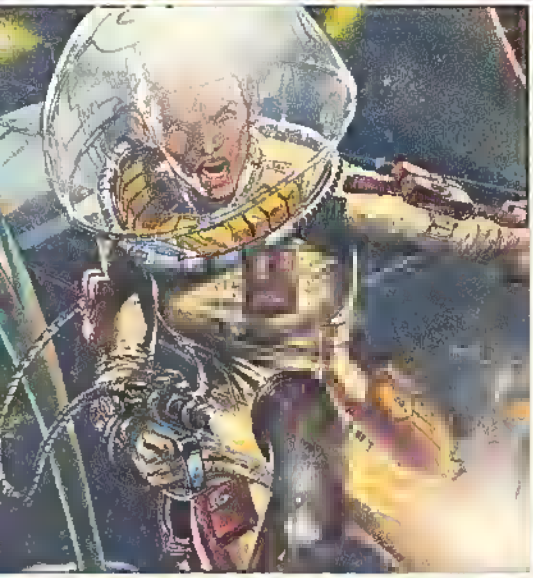
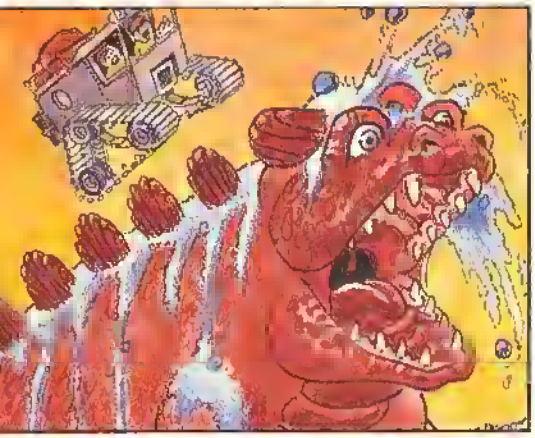
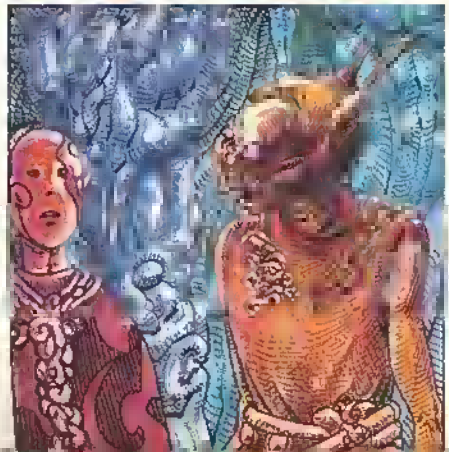
Special Science-Fiction Issue featuring: Harlan Ellison's "Life Hutch"







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ALLLLL RIGHT! THAT'S IT, I WIN, RALPHIE!

HEY! COME ON, JONNY! THAT WAS ILLEGAL!

BULL! I JUST BENT THE PROBABILITIES A LITTLE USIN' THAT EXPLOSIVE. I WOULDN'T CHEAT YA, RALPHIE.

NOW THAT'S A LAUGH.

OKAY, OKAY, RALPHIE. TELL YA WHAT. I'LL GIVE YA A CHANCE TO GET EVEN. NEW GAME, CRYBABY.

UH... I DUNNO, JONNY. WE KEEP DOIN' THIS... THEY'RE GONNA FIND OUT.

FLASH SPORT

JEEZUS! YOU DORK! THE TAP'S SHROUDED... REAL GOOD. AN' EVEN IF THEY FIND IT... THINK THEY'LL SUSPECT TWO PUNK-ASS KIDS?! THEY WON'T EVEN ADMIT ANYBODY BUT THEIR BIG DEAL EXPERTS CAN DO THIS. 'SIDES... YA WANNA GO BACK TO INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY AFTER HAVIN' THE WHOLE FRIGGIN' OVER-SYSTEMS TO PLAY WITH?!

WELL... ONCE MORE, JONNY. BUT NO MORE CHEATING! LET ME ERASE THE ROBOT AND-- HEY! YOU'RE STARTIN' BEFORE I'M LOCKED...! AN' THAT'S NOT A MADE-UP SHIP! THAT'S--

A TRANS-PLANETARY LINER. LET'S MAKE IT REAL FOR A CHANGE, RALPHIE. MY PLAYER'S ON BOARD...

... AN' HE'S MAKIN HIS *MOVE*.

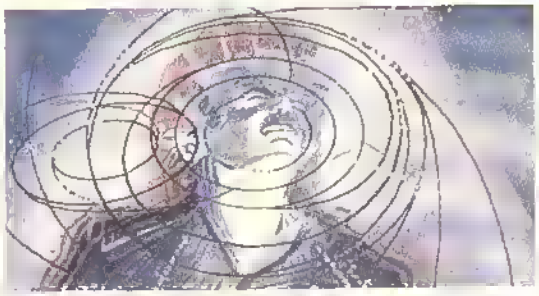
CRAP, JONNY! WHO *IS* HE? WHAT'S HE SUPPOSED TO B-- OH. HE'S BRIBIN' THE SHUTTLE BAY ATTENDANT. HE'S... A *SMUGGLER? SPY,* MAYBE...?

COMPUTE IT, *YOURSELF,* RALPHIE. I'M NOT MAKIN' IT EASY... LIKE WITH *SPACE ROBOTS.*

NO, YOU'RE MAKIN' IT COMPLICATED... SO YOU CAN *CHEAT!* AND YOU'RE DRAWIN' OFF MORE *POWER* THAN WE'VE EVER USED JUST SETTIN' IT UP, JONNY. THEY'RE GONNA CATCH *ON,* MAN! THEY'RE--

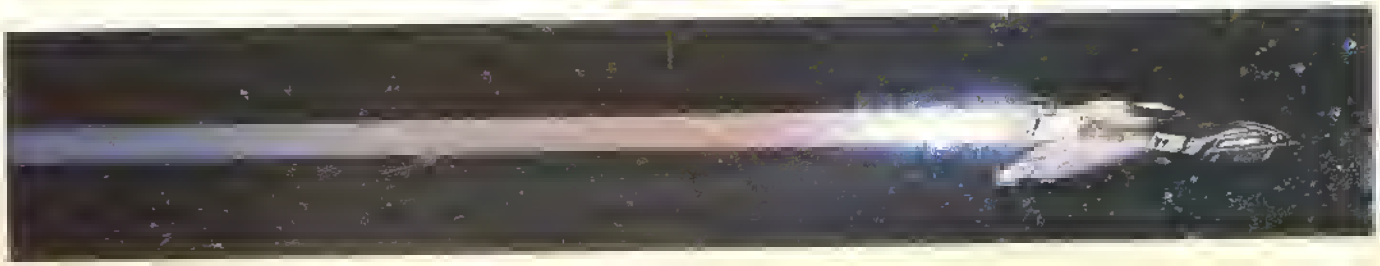
F'R CHRISSAKE, RALPHIE, FORGET ALL THAT AN' PLAY THE *GAME.* NOW MY MAN'S GRABBED A SHUTTLE CRAFT... HE'S READY TO LAUNCH...

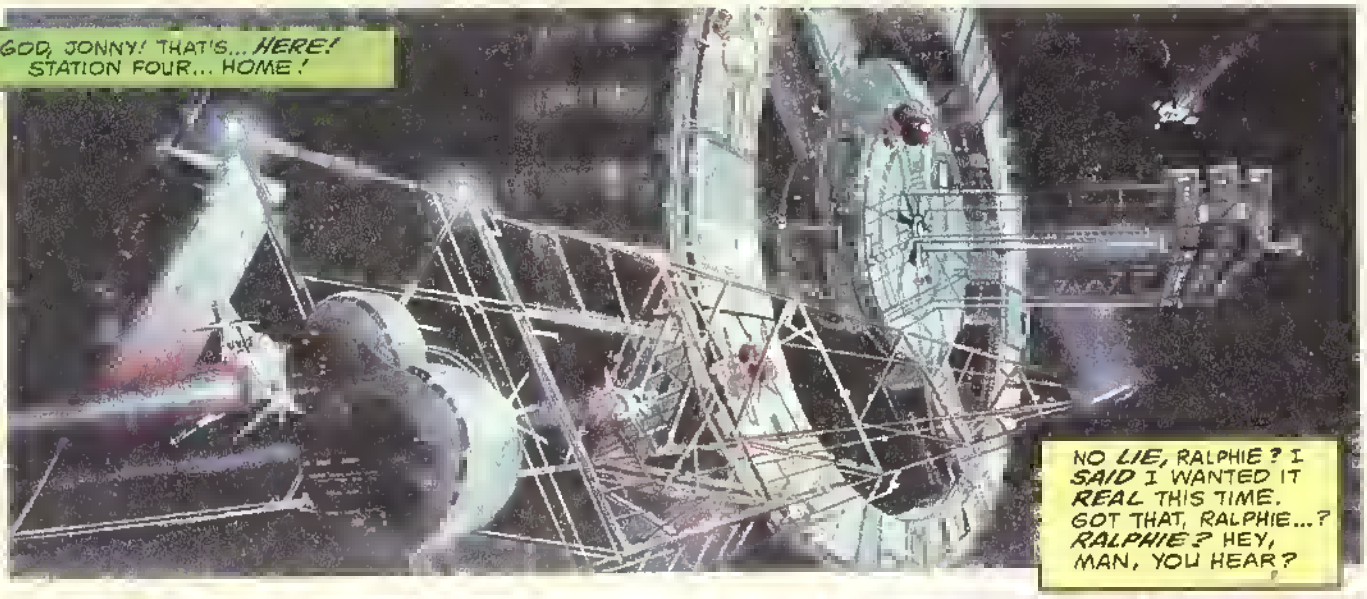
LET ME SWITCH THE MONITOR IN CLOSE. JEEZ, JONNY...! HE LOOKS... KIND'A .. I DON'T KNOW...! HIS *EYES...* SORT'A *SCARY... COLD!* I... I'M...

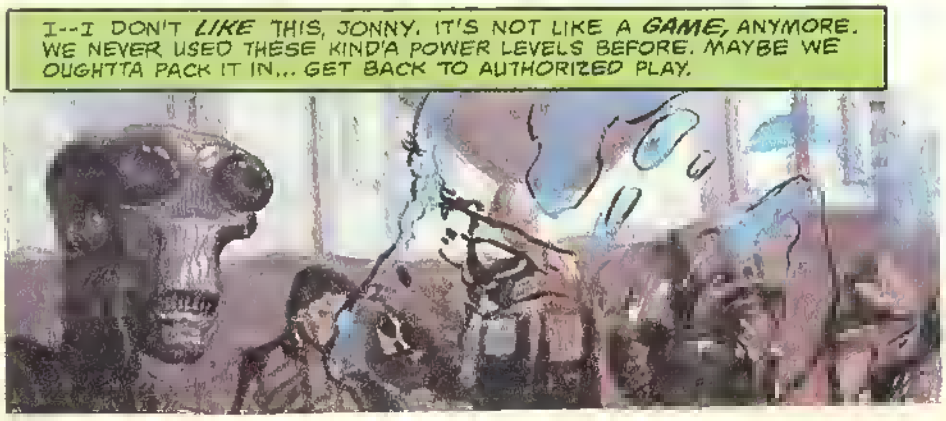


OH, THAT'S *CUTE,* RALPHIE... THAT'S REALLY *TOUGH* STRATEGY! THE GUY SCARES YA' 'CAUSE HE LOOKS SO HARD AN' YOU HIT 'IM WITH *EXCESS G-FORCE!* WHATTA YA THINK HE'S GONNA DO... *MELT?* GOTTA DO BETTER THAN *THAT* IF YA WANNA *WIN* THIS TIME, RALPHIE, OL' BUDDY, OL' PAL.

MAYBE I'M JUST TESTIN' TO SEE WHAT YOUR GUY CAN *TAKE,* JONNY. NOW SHUT UP, AN' LET ME TRACK HIS SHIP!







BACK TO *TOYS,* YA MEAN! WELL, GO *AHEAD,* CHICKEN SHIT... SEE IF I CARE! JUST FORGET ANY MORE *FRIENDS* CRAP! GO BACK TO BEIN' THE SAME LONELY LITTLE DORK WITH THE HIGH I.Q. AN' NOTHIN' ELSE YA WERE *BEFORE* WE LINKED UP!

OKAY, *OKAY,* JONNY. I'LL STICK. I'LL EVEN SHOW YOU I CAN *WIN.* I'LL--AW, *DAMN!* I'VE LOST HIM IN THE CROWD!

HA! YOU WERE TOO BUSY WETTIN' YOUR PANTS. HERE... I'LL MAKE IT *EASY.*

JEEZUS, I *HATE* THOSE CREEPY EYES! BUT IF YOU THINK I CAN'T *FIX* 'IM FROM THIS MAGNA-BAND VIEW, JONNY...

... THINK *AGAIN.*

LOVE THE LADY, RALPHIE.. BUT YA GOT A *THING* FOR ROBOTS? WASN'T LAST GAME ENOUGH? GIMME A BREAK, MAN... SHOW SOME *FLASH* WITH YOUR AGENTS.

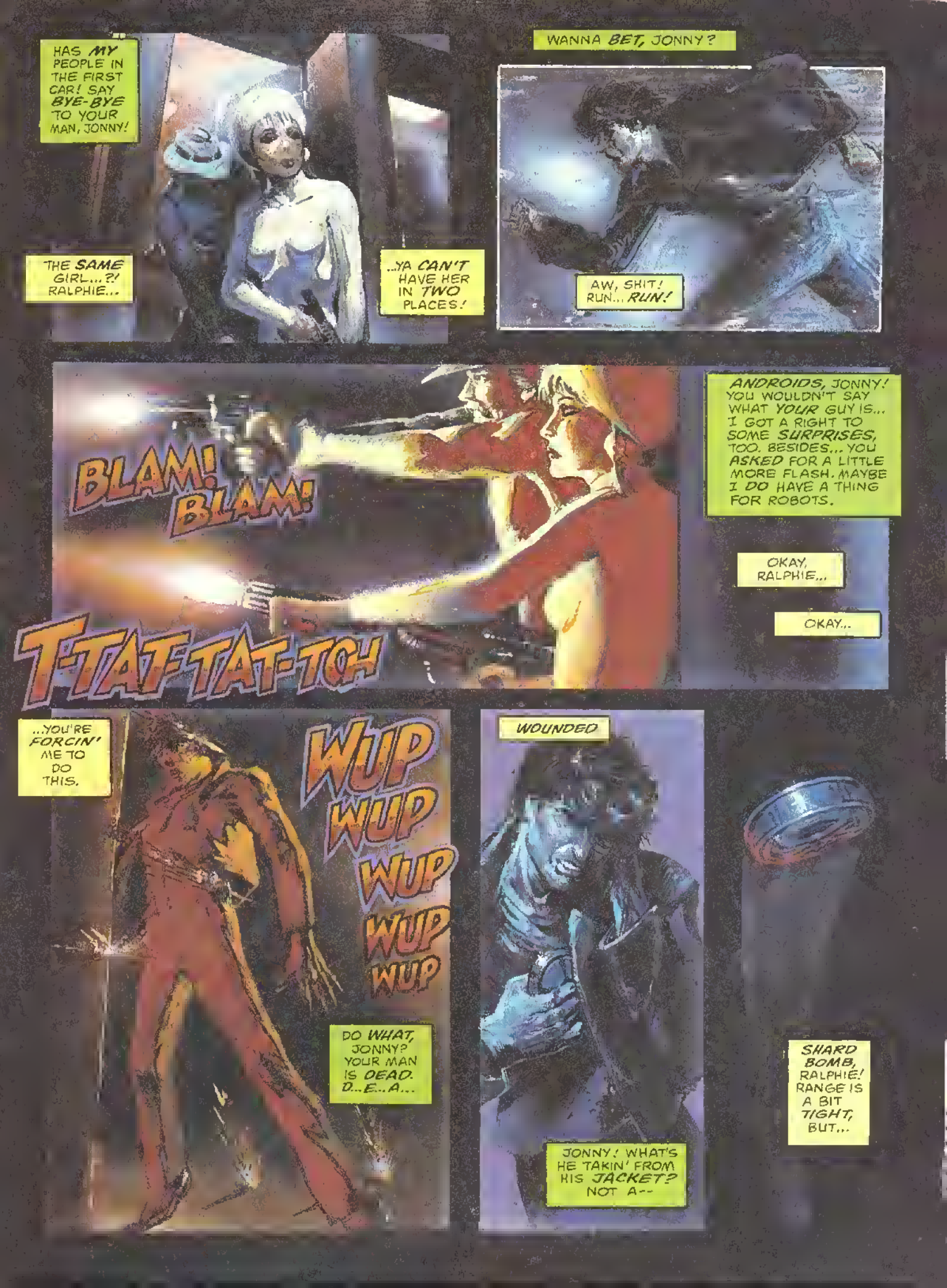
I *KNOW* WHAT YOU'RE DOING, JONNY, TRYIN' TO *DISTRACT* ME...

... BUT *YOUR* PLAYER IS THE ONE IN TROUBLE! YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE STUCK HIM DOWN IN THE *TUBES,* JONNY... I JUST *SEALED OFF* ALL THE EXITS!

204

ADLIN

TALK ABOUT *ME* CHEATIN', RALPHIE...! THAT'S AGAINST CODE SEVEN. BUT INSTEAD'A WHININ' OR QUITTIN'... I'M GETTIN' MY GUY *OUT!* THAT *HOVER-TRAM*--


HAS MY PEOPLE IN THE FIRST CAR! SAY BYE-BYE TO YOUR MAN, JONNY!
THE SAME GIRL...?! RALPHIE...
...YA CAN'T HAVE HER IN TWO PLACES!
WANNA BET, JONNY?
AW, SHIT! RUN... RUN!
BLAM! BLAM!
T-TAT-TAT-TCH
ANDROIDS, JONNY! YOU WOULDN'T SAY WHAT YOUR GUY IS... I GOT A RIGHT TO SOME SURPRISES, TOO. BESIDES... YOU ASKED FOR A LITTLE MORE FLASH. MAYBE I DO HAVE A THING FOR ROBOTS.
OKAY, RALPHIE...
OKAY...
...YOU'RE FORCIN' ME TO DO THIS.
WUP WUP WUP WUP WUP
DO WHAT, JONNY? YOUR MAN IS DEAD. D...E...A...
WOUNDED
JONNY! WHAT'S HE TAKIN' FROM HIS JACKET? NOT A--
SHARD BOMB, RALPHIE! RANGE IS A BIT TIGHT, BUT...

WWHHOAAAMMMMM!

...YA CAN'T *WIN* IF YA DON'T TAKE *CHANCES!*

WHAT A *BLAST!..!* WHAT A FREAKIN' BLAST, JONNY! MOST'A MY SENSORIES ARE WIPED.. *TOTALLED!*

GEEZ, WAS THAT *REAL!* LIKE *BEIN' THERE*, JONNY! WOW! REALLY *HOT!*

BUT YOUR MAN WAS *TOO CLOSE* TO BLAST CENTER... NO POINTS FOR *SUICIDE*, PAL. I *WIN*... I *WIN!*

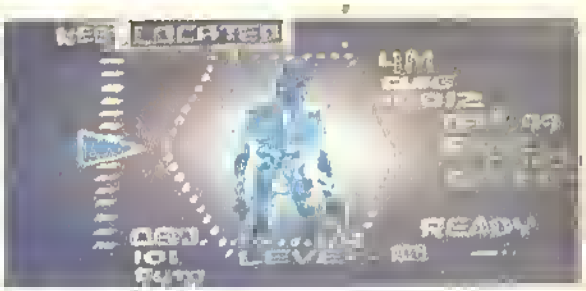
UH... RALPHIE...

RALPHIE...?

I-I'M PICKIN' *UP* SOMETHIN'.. A... A *HEARTBEAT*, RALPHIE! YEAH... I'M LOCKED IN ON IT. I-IT'S... *HIM*, RALPHIE.

BULLSHIT, JONNY! YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO ADMIT--

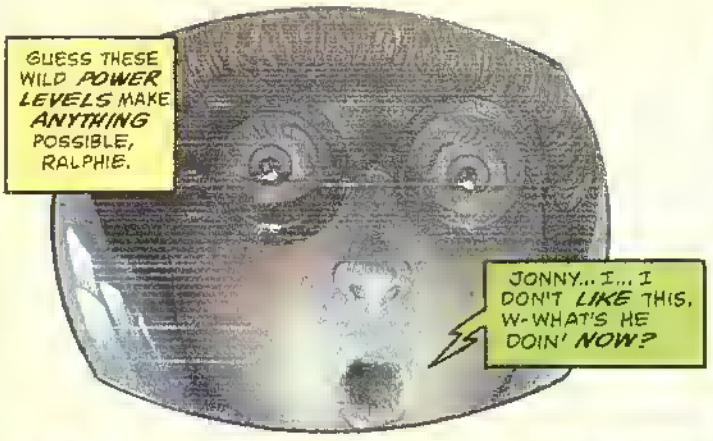
GODDAMMIT, I'M PATCHIN' MY *SCAN* OVER TO YOU. *LOOK!* I *KNOW* IT'S KIND OF *STRANGE*, RALPHIE...



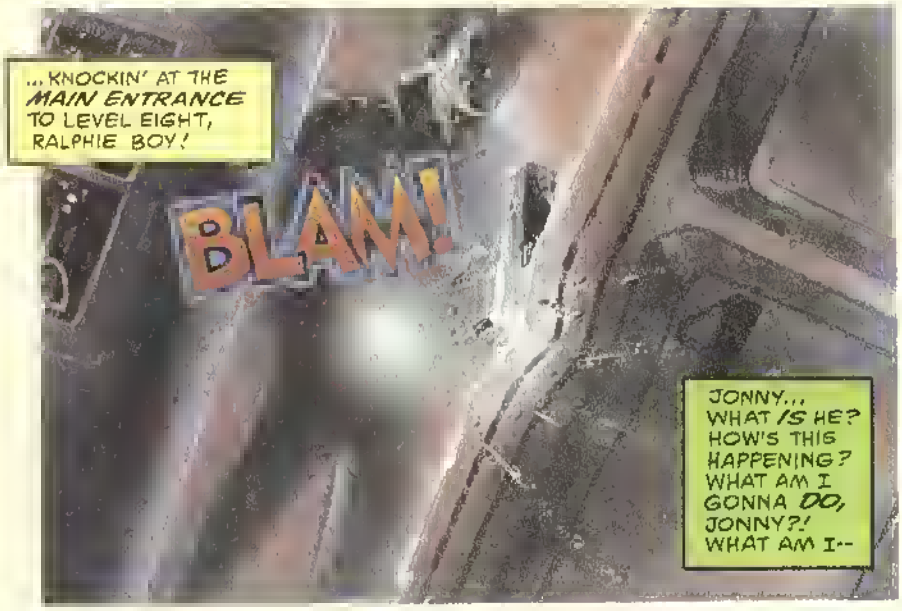
...BUT TELL ME THAT ISN'T *HIM!*

J-JONNY... OUR PROBABILITY SPREAD ISN'T THAT *FLUID*. HE *C-COULDN'T* SURVIVE...

RALPHIE... HE'S *THERE!*



HE'S MOVIN,' RALPHIE. BLAST OPENED SOME'A THE STATION'S REPAIR TUNNELS. HE'S USIN' 'EM... HEADIN' TOWARD... LESSEE... LEVEL EIGHT...

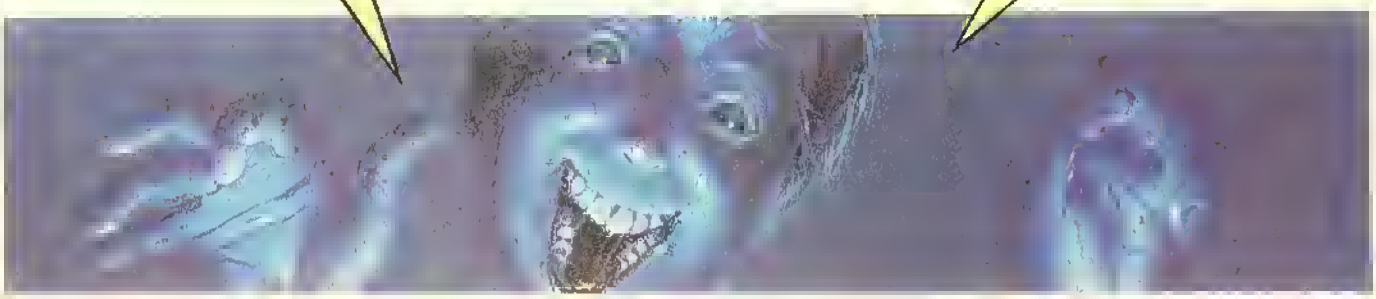


THE AIRLOCK! I'M OPENING THE AIRLOCK, JONNY! IMPOSSIBLE HE CAN SURVIVE IN A VACUUM, RIGHT?

TOO LATE, RALPHIE! HE'S A THROUGH THE OUTER-CORRIDORS... HE'S INTO THE SAFETY CHAMBER... RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR! RIGHT OUTSIDE!

J-JONNY...! PLEASE! WHOEVER HE IS... MAKE HIM STOP! MAKE HIM STOP!

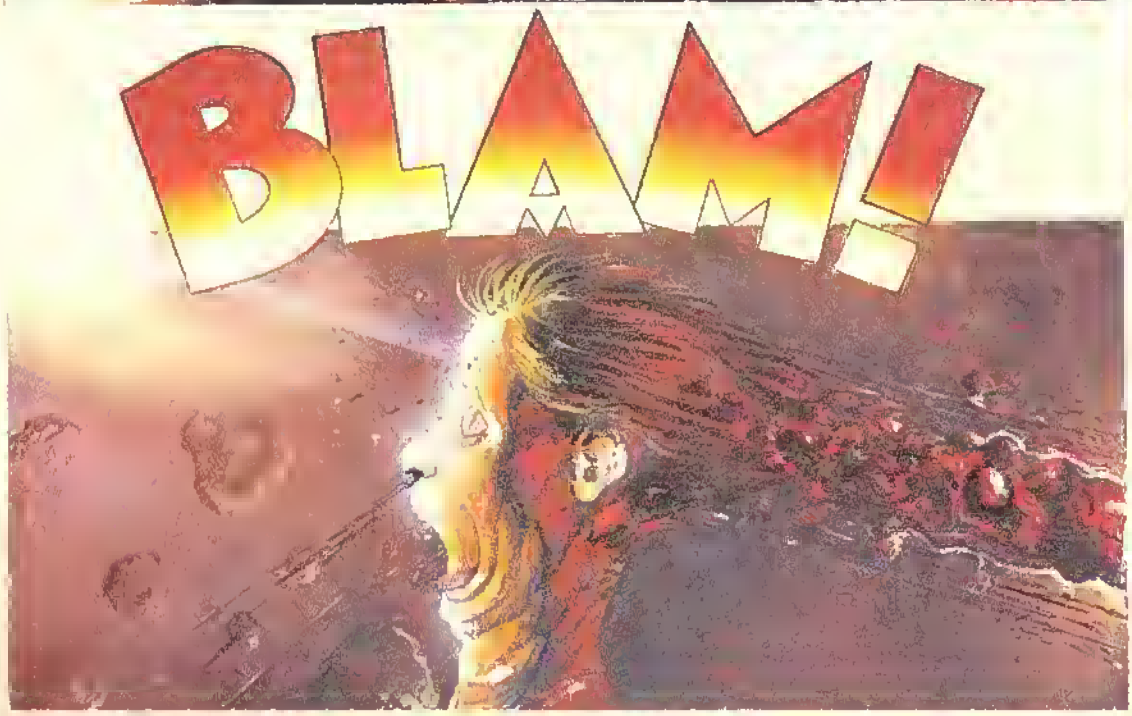
I CAN'T, RALPHIE! HE'S A MONSTER! HE'S A BIG CREEPY MONSTER! HE'S THE CREEPING FANG MONSTER... THE BOOGEYMAN! COMIN' TO GET YA, RALPHIE! THE BOOGEYMAN! HA HA HA HA HA HA!



HA, HA! FOOLED YOU, JONNY.

SUCKERED YOU INTO LEAVING YOUR BOARD, MAN... THAT'S A FORFEIT, MY GAME, JONNY.

"THESE WILD POWER LEVELS MAKE ANYTHING POSSIBLE," MY ASS! WHAT A DUMB BLUFF, JONNY! THERE'S NOTHIN' UP HERE... NOTHIN'!

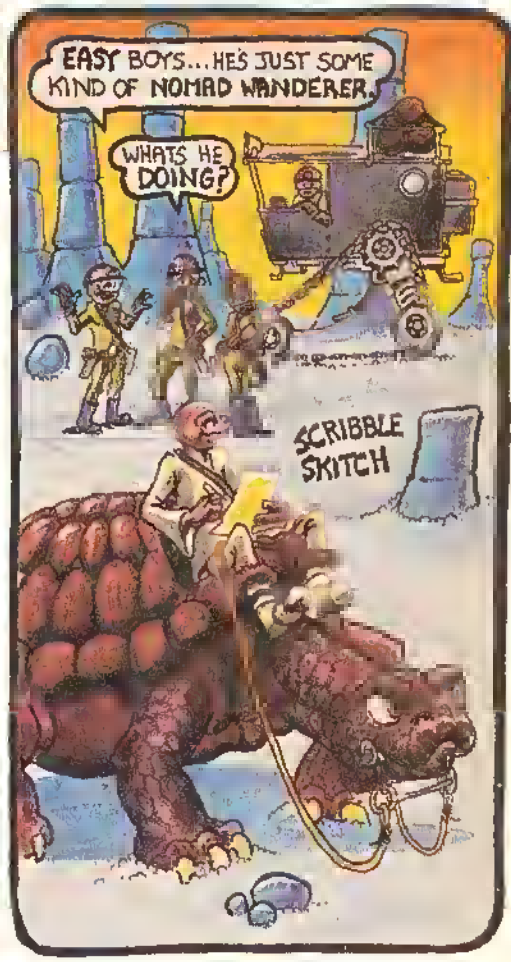


WHO'S THE DORK NOW, HUH? I'M COMIN' DOWN TO RUB IT IN, JONNY! GOT THAT? JONNY...? HERE I COME... READY OR NOT!

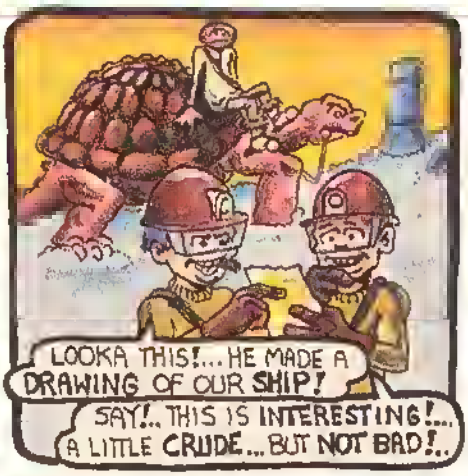
PRED•A•TOR

(n.) 1: A mode of life that survives by consuming the substance of other animals. 2: Disposed of to exploit others, (warfare).

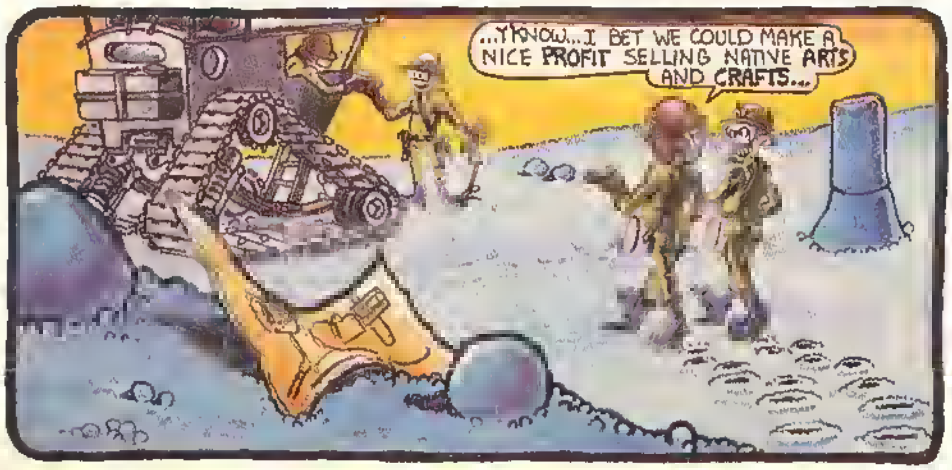
...WE GET THE HEAD CHIEF'S MARK ON THIS CONTRACT... POW! ...WE OWN THE WHOLE PLACE! (HEE-HEE)...NICE AN LEGAL!
HEH-HEH...IT WORKED ON MANHATTAN...
HEY BOSS!...WE GOT COMPANY!


EASY BOYS...HE'S JUST SOME KIND OF NOMAD WANDERER.
WHATS HE DOING?
SCRIBBLE SKITCH

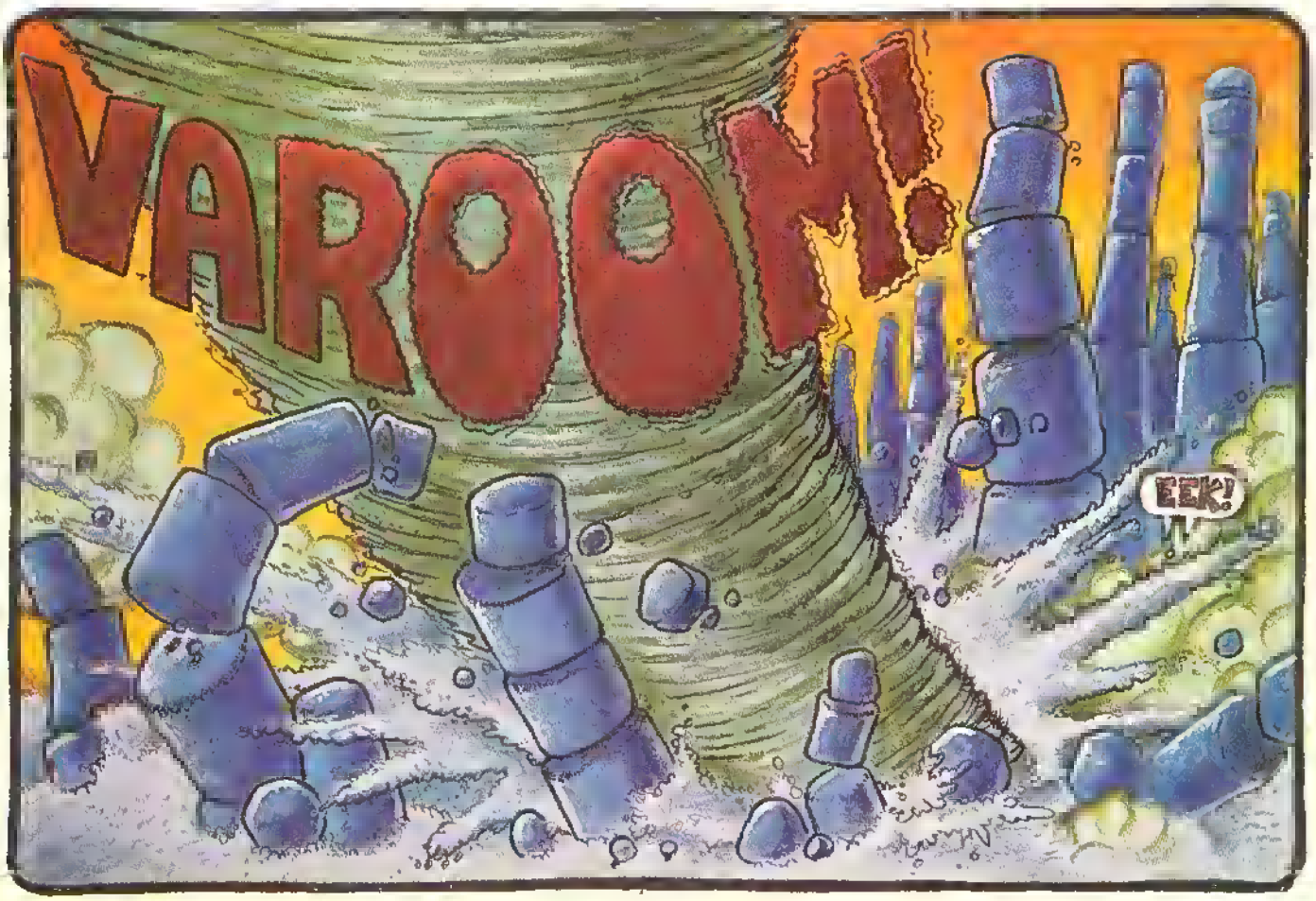
OK MICHELANGELO...LET'S SEE WHAT YER UP TOO...
IF DA FROG MOVES BLOW HIM AWAY...
SNATCH


LOOKA THIS!...HE MADE A DRAWING OF OUR SHIP!
SAY!.. THIS IS INTERESTING!... A LITTLE CRUDE...BUT NOT BAD!..

THERE'S A REALLY BIG MARKET FOR PRIMITIVE ART!..
WHAA POP WHAA
WHAAAAAA POW! AAAA


...Y'KNOW...I BET WE COULD MAKE A NICE PROFIT SELLING NATIVE ARTS AND CRAFTS...

♫
LOOK THERE!
PFFGE
DUST DEVIL!

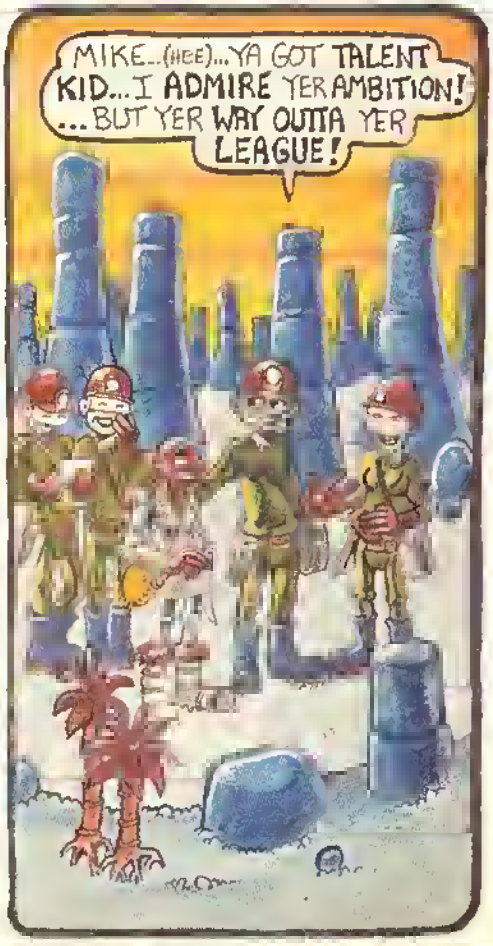

VAROOM!!!
EEK!

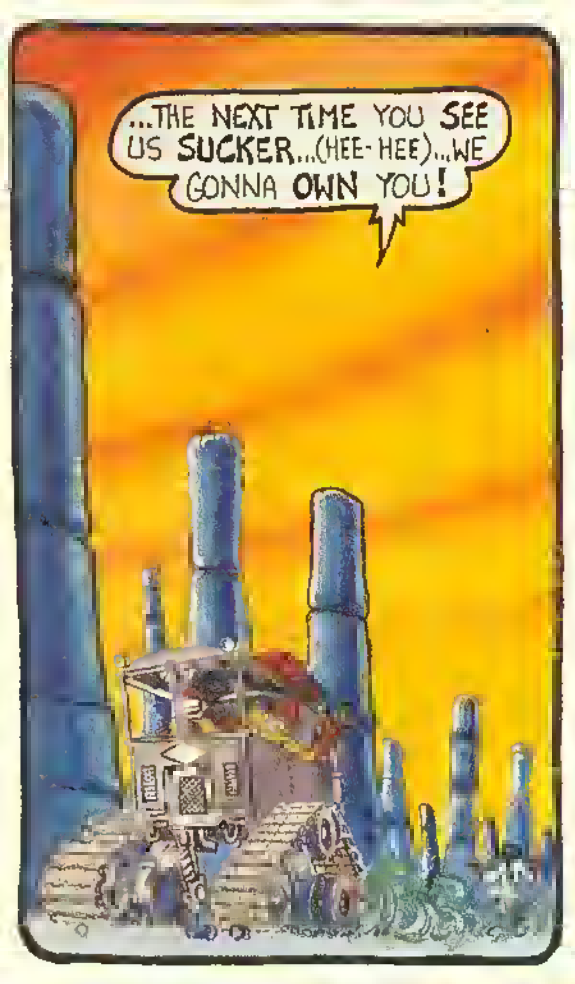
EEEGE
HOLY CHRIST!

PUFF PANT
GRUMBLE BITCH GRIPE
CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH

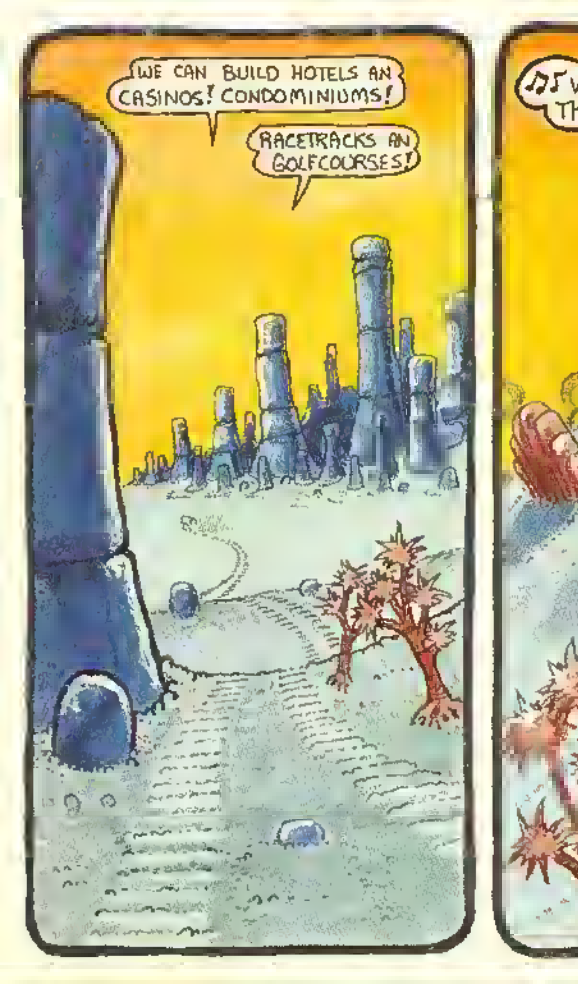
ITS MICHELANGELO AGAIN!
GLUG GLUG
THE GEEK GOT NOTHIN BETTER TA DO THAN RIDE AROUND DRAWIN' PITCHERS!

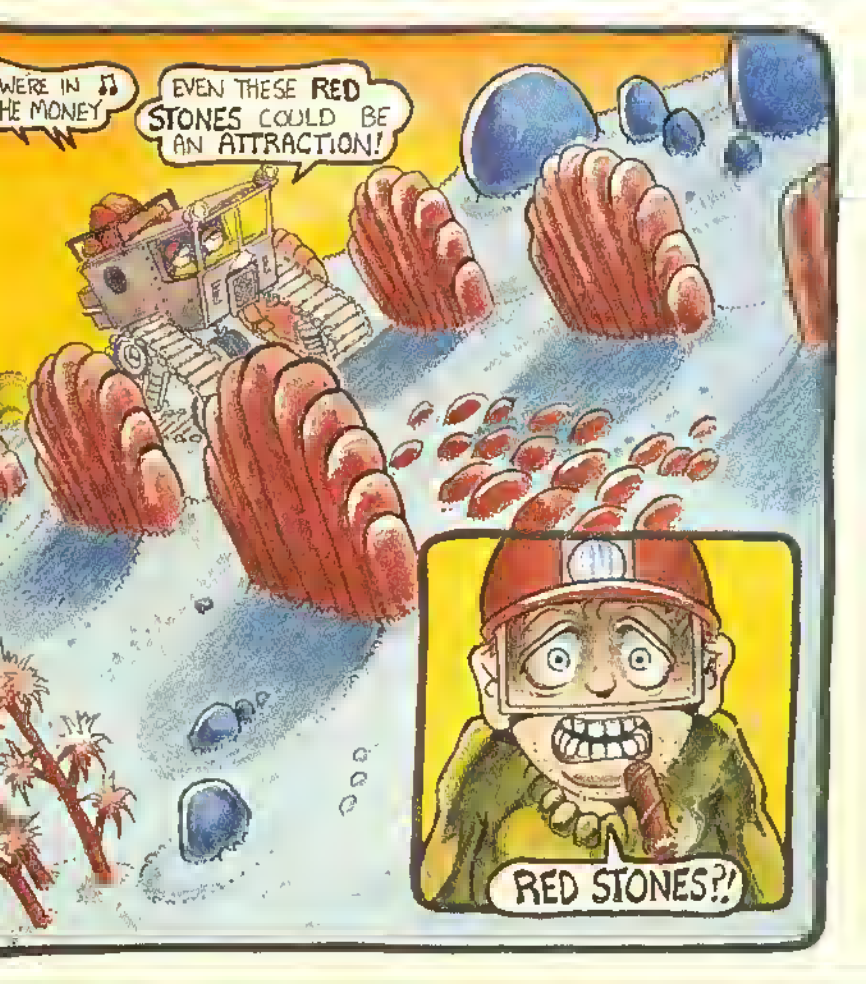
(HEE-HEE)...GET THIS! HE WANTS TO SWAP HIS TURTLE FOR OUR SAND TRACTOR!

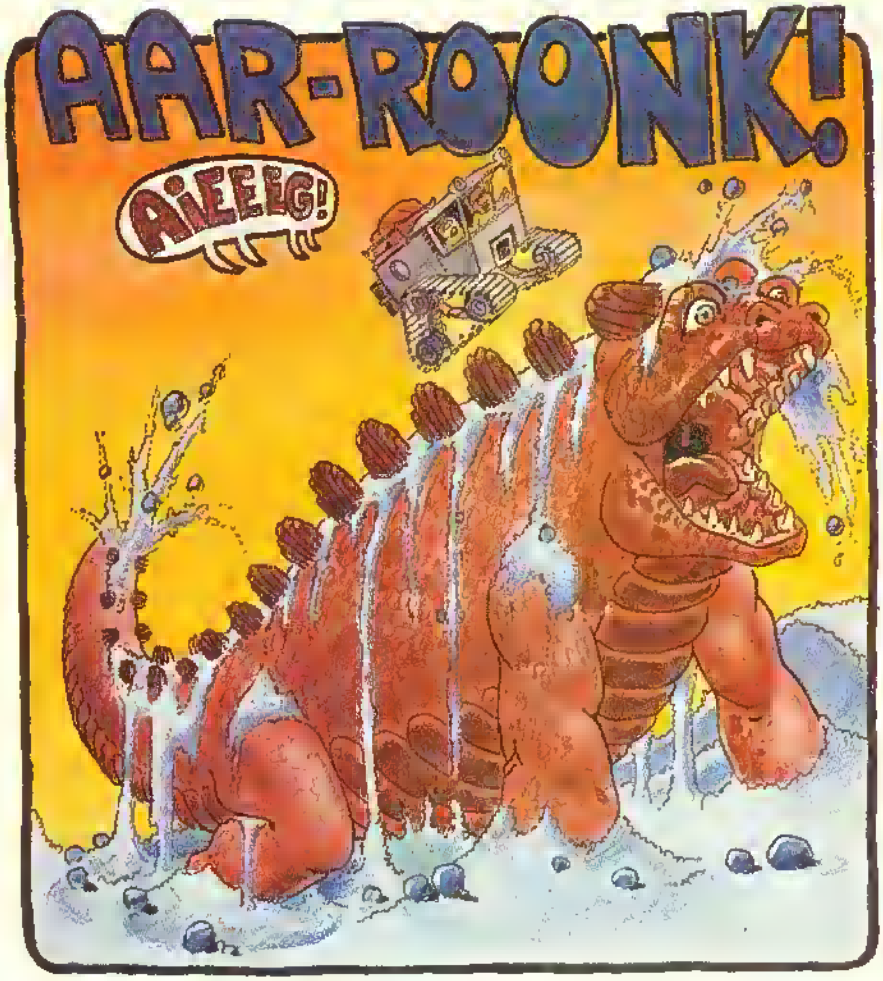

MIKE...(HEE)...YA GOT TALENT KID...I ADMIRE YER AMBITION! ...BUT YER WAY OUTTA YER LEAGUE!


...THE NEXT TIME YOU SEE US SUCKER...(HEE-HEE)...WE GONNA OWN YOU!

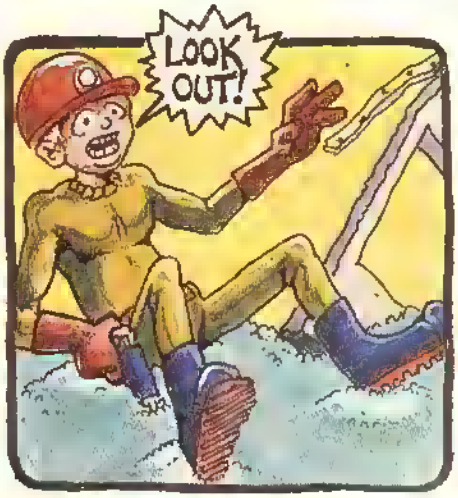
...Y'KNOW...THIS IS BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY. IF WE MOVED THE NATIVES OFF THE OASIS IT COULD BE ONE HELLUVA RESORT AREA!
GODDAM! WHAT A GREAT IDEA!...WE COULD BILL IT AS THE NEW LAS VEGAS!


WE CAN BUILD HOTELS AN CASINOS! CONDOMINIUMS!
RACETRACKS AN GOLFCOURSES!

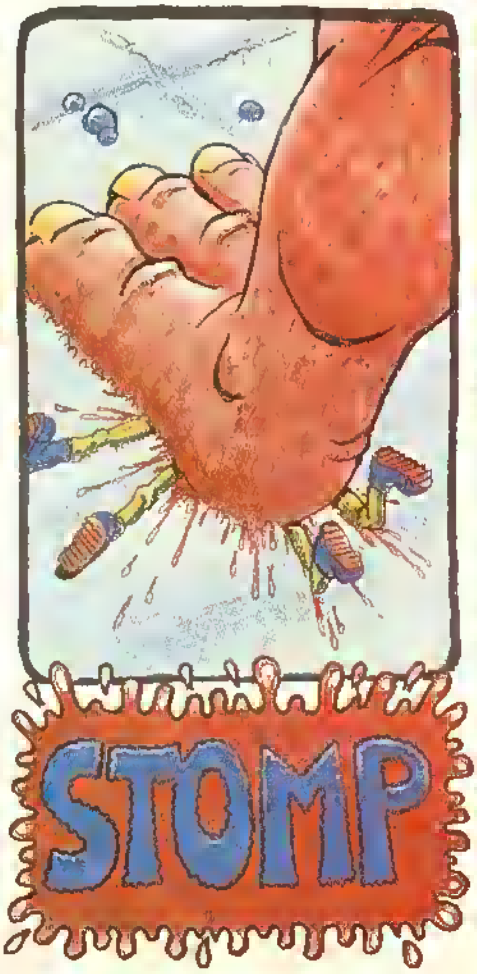

♫♪ WERE IN ♫ THE MONEY
EVEN THESE RED STONES COULD BE AN ATTRACTION!
RED STONES?!


AAR-ROONK!
AiEEEG!

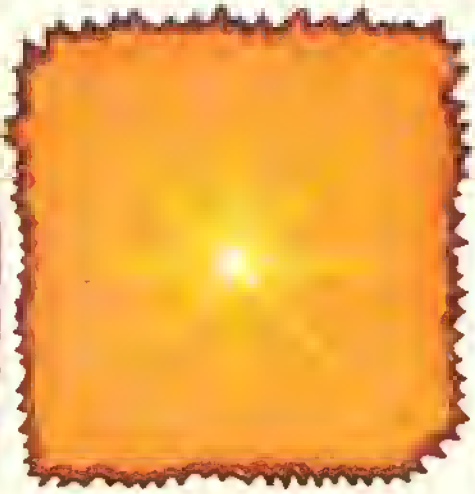
WUNCH!

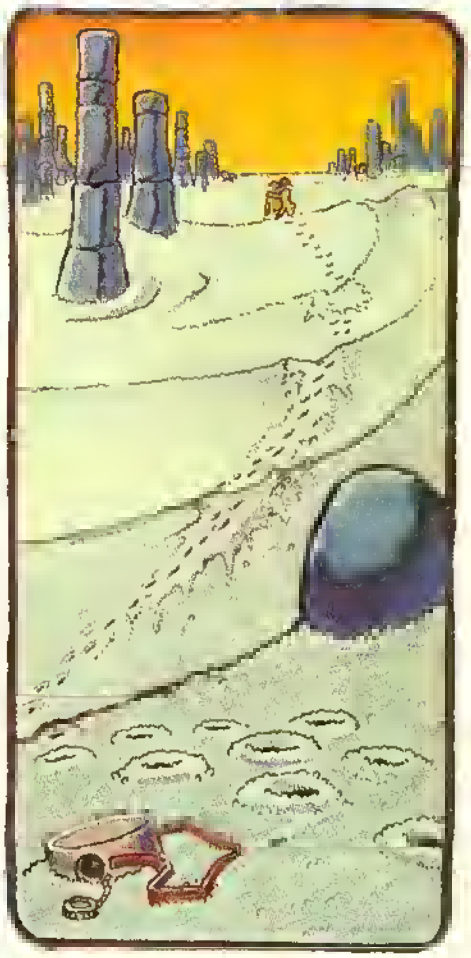

LOOK OUT!

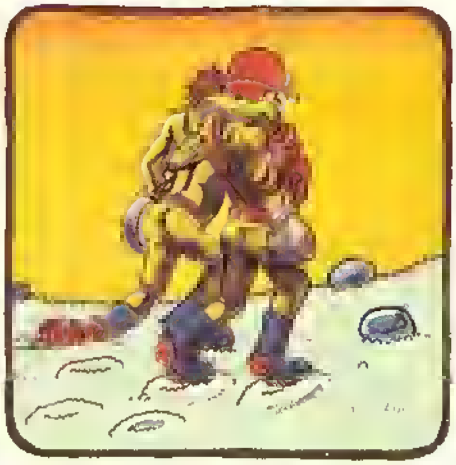
YAHH!


STOMP

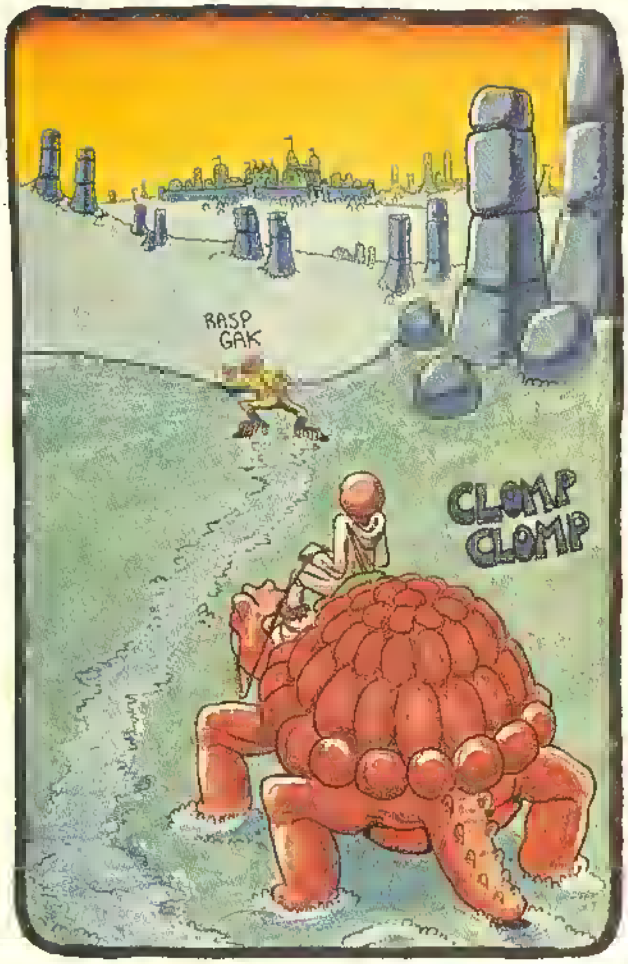
LOPE LOPE
@*!$@?*
BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!







WHEEZE
GASP
PUFF

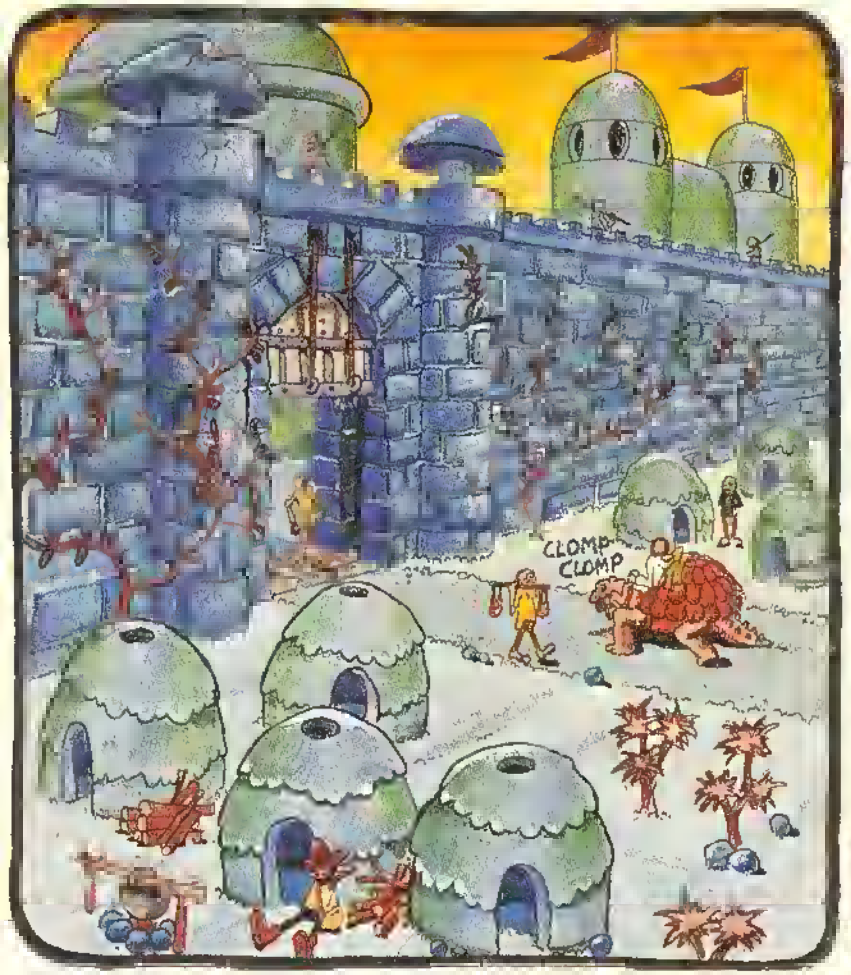

RASP
GAK
CLOMP
CLOMP

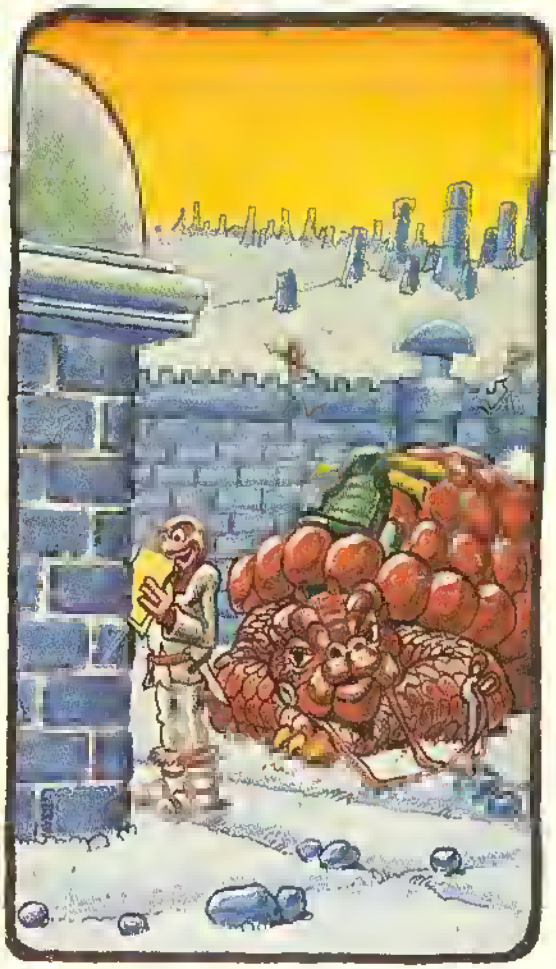
W-WATER...

SKIBBLE
SKITCH

... GASP... Y-YOU WANT TO T-TRADE?... YES-YES... ANYTHING! PANT... WATER... PLEASE!

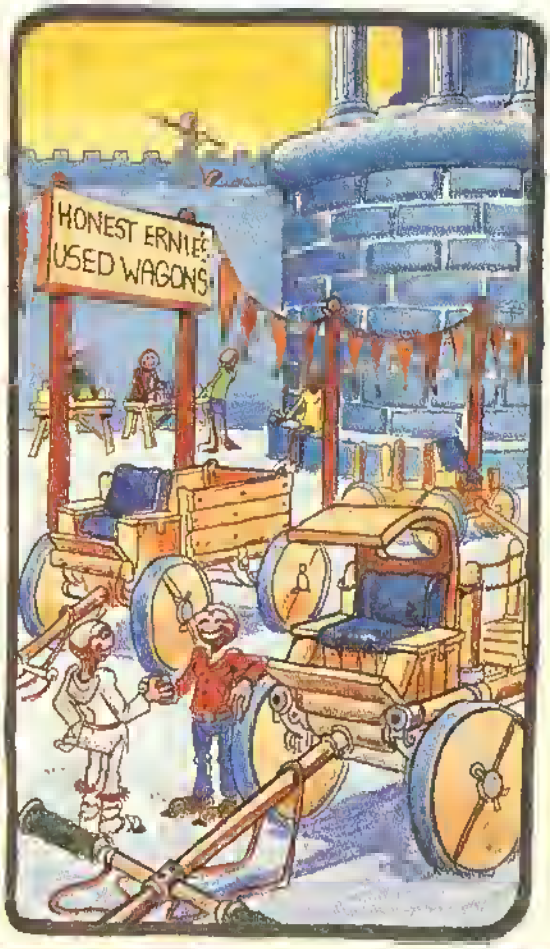
NYAA-HA-HA... GASP! WATER!

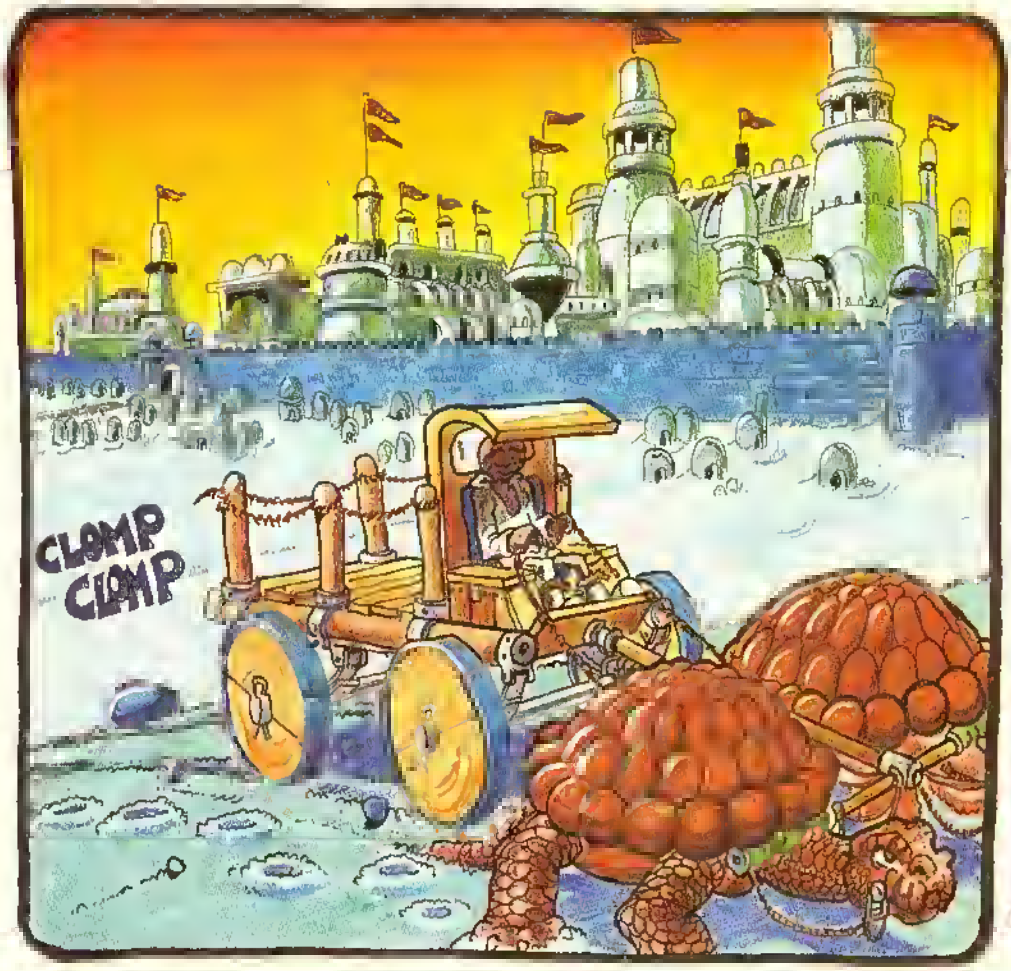

CLOMP CLOMP



CHEESEQUAKE
CLAIMS OFFICE
STAMP!
STAMP!
STAMP!

CLAIM
CLAIM
CLAIM


HONEST ERNIE'S
USED WAGONS



END

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LIFE HUTCH

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Story by
Harlan Ellison
Illustrated by
Ken Steacy

Terrence slid his right hand, the one out of sight of the robot, up his side. The razoring pain of the three broken ribs caused his eyes to widen momentarily in pain. Then he recovered himself and closed them till he was studying the machine through narrow slits.

If the eyeballs click, I'm dead, thought Terrence.

The intricate murmurings of the life hutch around him brought back the immediacy of his situation. His eyes again fastened on the medicine cabinet clamped to the wall next to the robot's duty-niche.

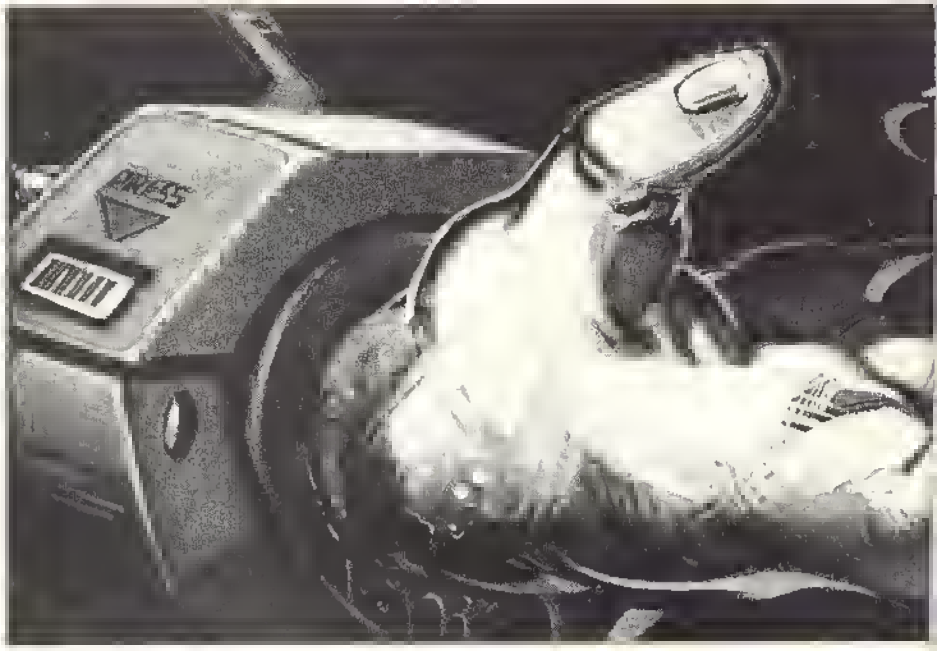
Cliché. So near yet so far. It could be all the way back on Antares-Base for all the good it's doing me, he thought, and a crazy laugh rang through his head. He caught himself just in time. *Easy! Three days is a nightmare, but cracking up will only make it end sooner.* That was the last thing he wanted. But it couldn't go on much longer.

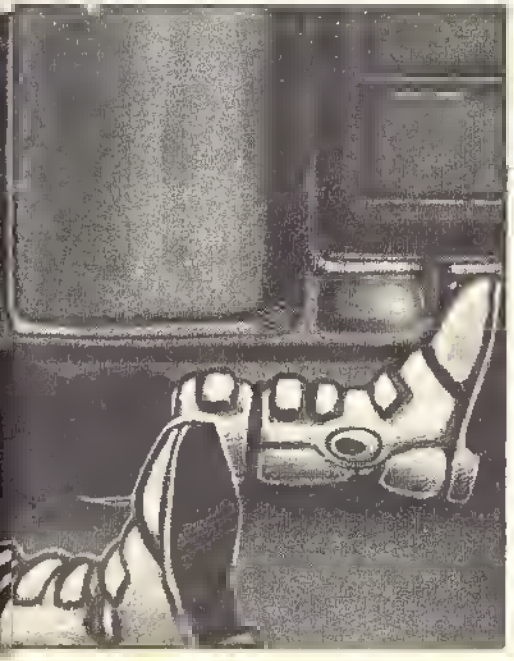
He flexed the fingers of his right hand. It was all he *could* move. Silently he damned the technician who had passed the robot through. Or the politician who had let inferior robots get placed in the life hutches so he could get a rake-off from the government contract. Or the repairman who hadn't bothered checking closely his last time around. All of them; he damned them all.

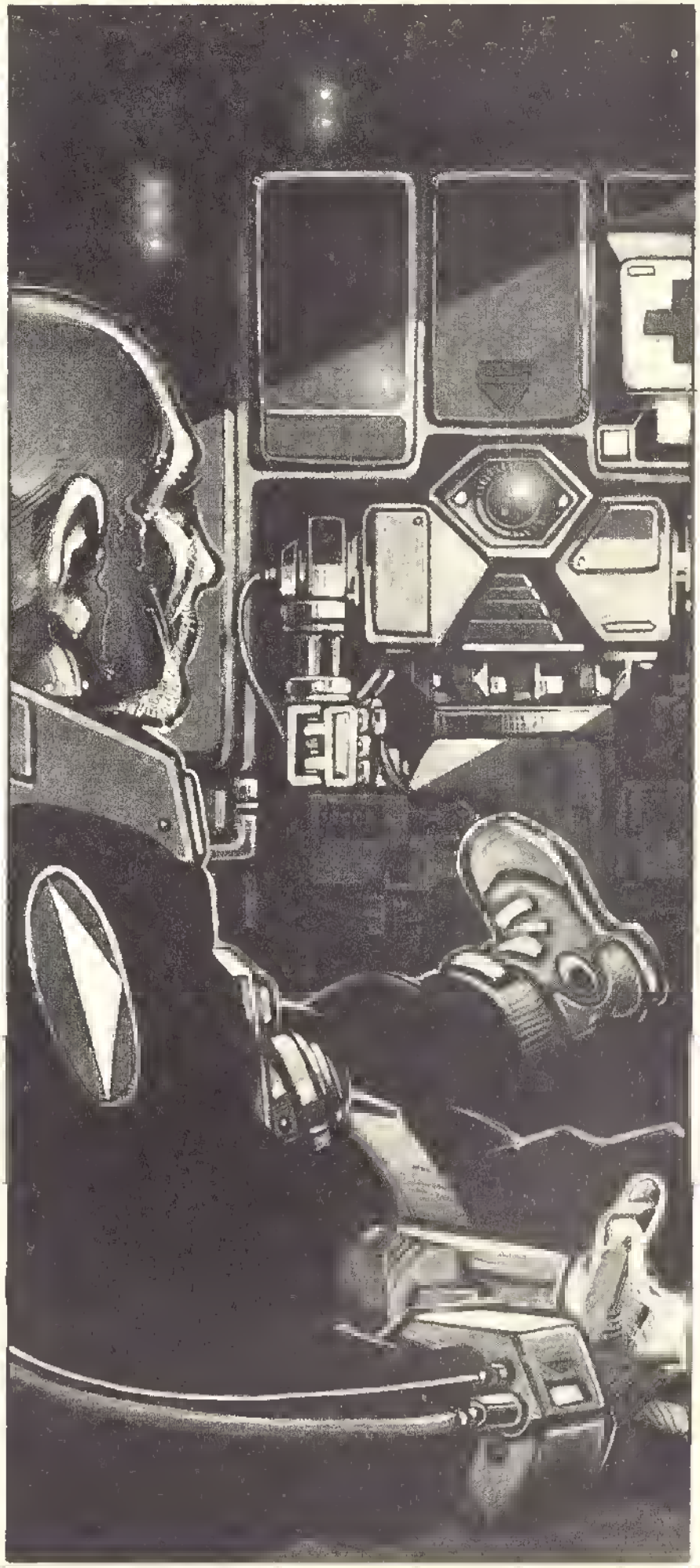
They deserved it.

He was dying.

His death had started before he had reached the life hutch. Terrence had begun to die when he had gone into the battle.







He let his eyes close completely, let the sounds of the life hutch fade from around him. Slowly, the sound of the coolants hush-hushing through the wall-pipes, the relay machines feeding their messages without pause from all over the galaxy, the whir of the antenna's standard turning in its socket atop the bubble, slowly they melted into silence.

He had resorted to blocking himself off from reality many times during the past three days. It was either that or existing with the robot watching, and eventually he would have had to move. To move was to die. It was that simple.

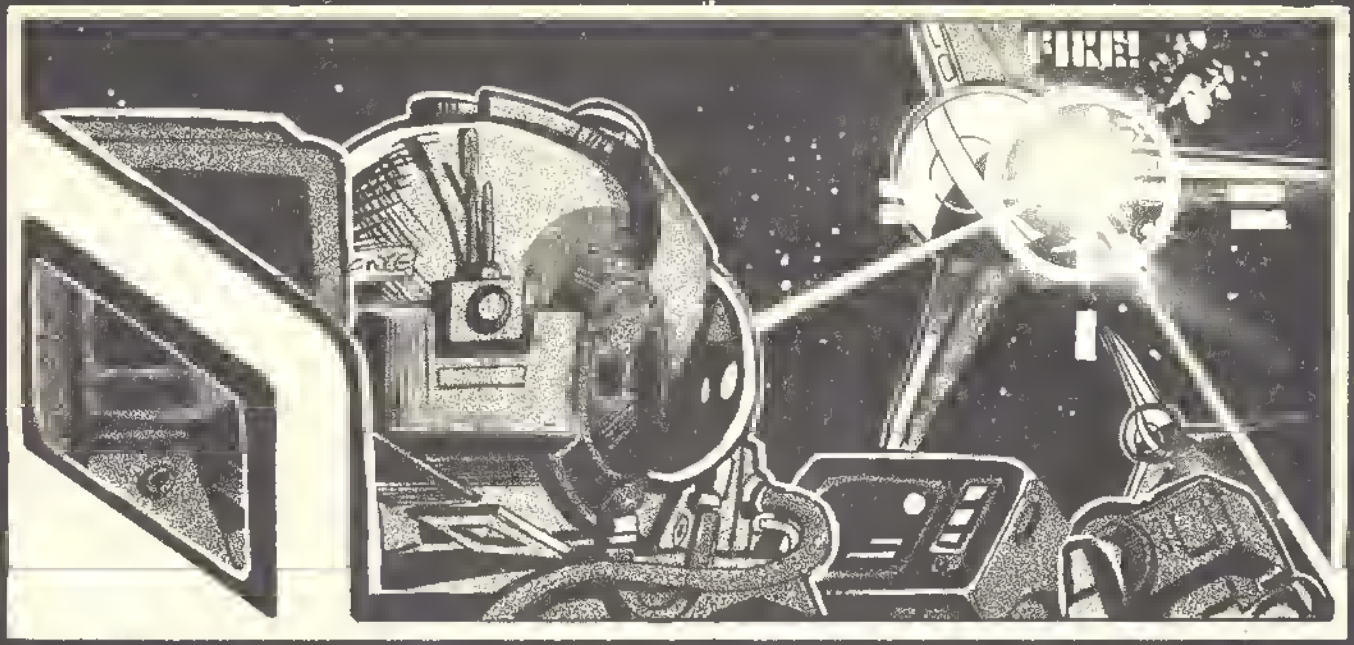
He closed his ears to the whisperings of the life hutch; he listened to the whisperings within himself.

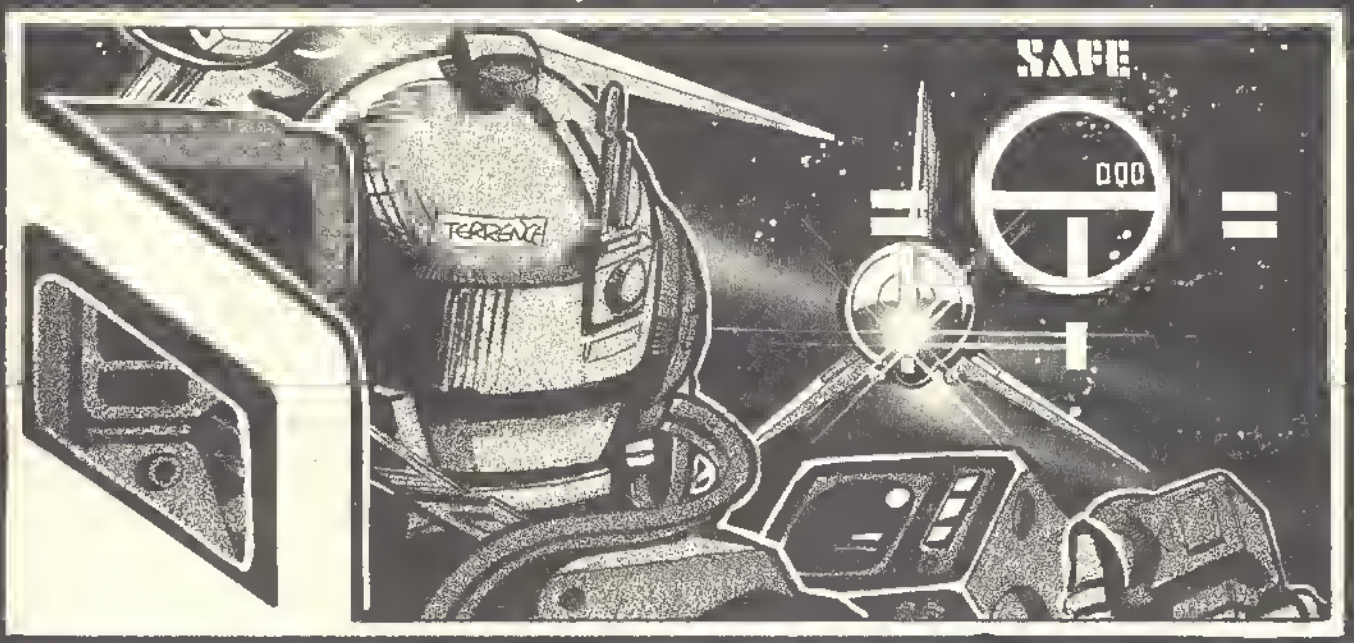
Good God! There must be a million of them!

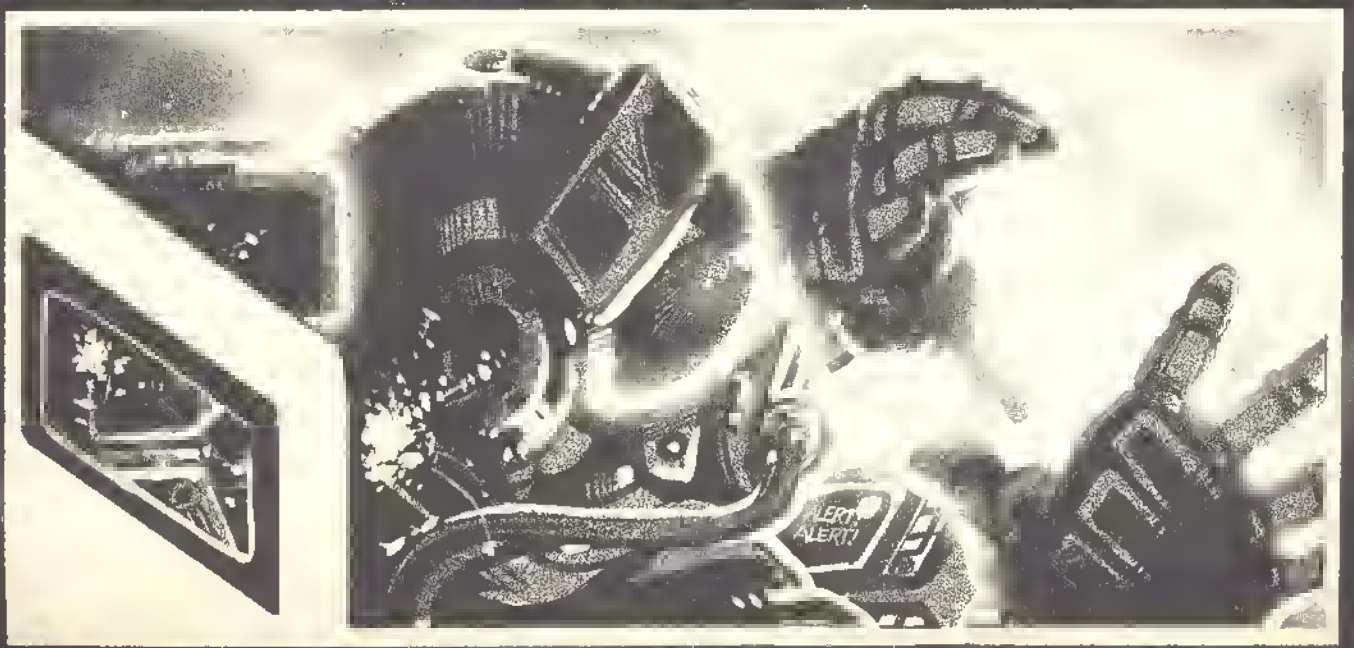
What kind of battle formation is *that* supposed to be?

Who can tell with those toadstool-shaped ships of theirs? But remember, the whole front umbrella-part is studded with cannon, and it has a helluva range of fire. Okay, watch yourselves, good luck— and give'em hell!

The fleet dove straight for the Kyben armada.


FIRE!


SAFE
000
TERRENCE


ALERT!
ALERT!

To his mind came the sounds of war, across the gulf of space. It was all imagination; in that tomb there was no sound. Yet he could clearly detect the hiss of his scout's blaster as it poured beam after beam into the lead ship of the Kyben fleet.

His sniper-class scout had been near the point of that deadly Terran phalanx, driving like a wedge at the alien ships, converging on them in loose battle-formation. It was then it had happened.

One moment he had been heading into the middle of the battle, the left flank of the giant Kyben dreadnought turning crimson under the impact of his firepower.

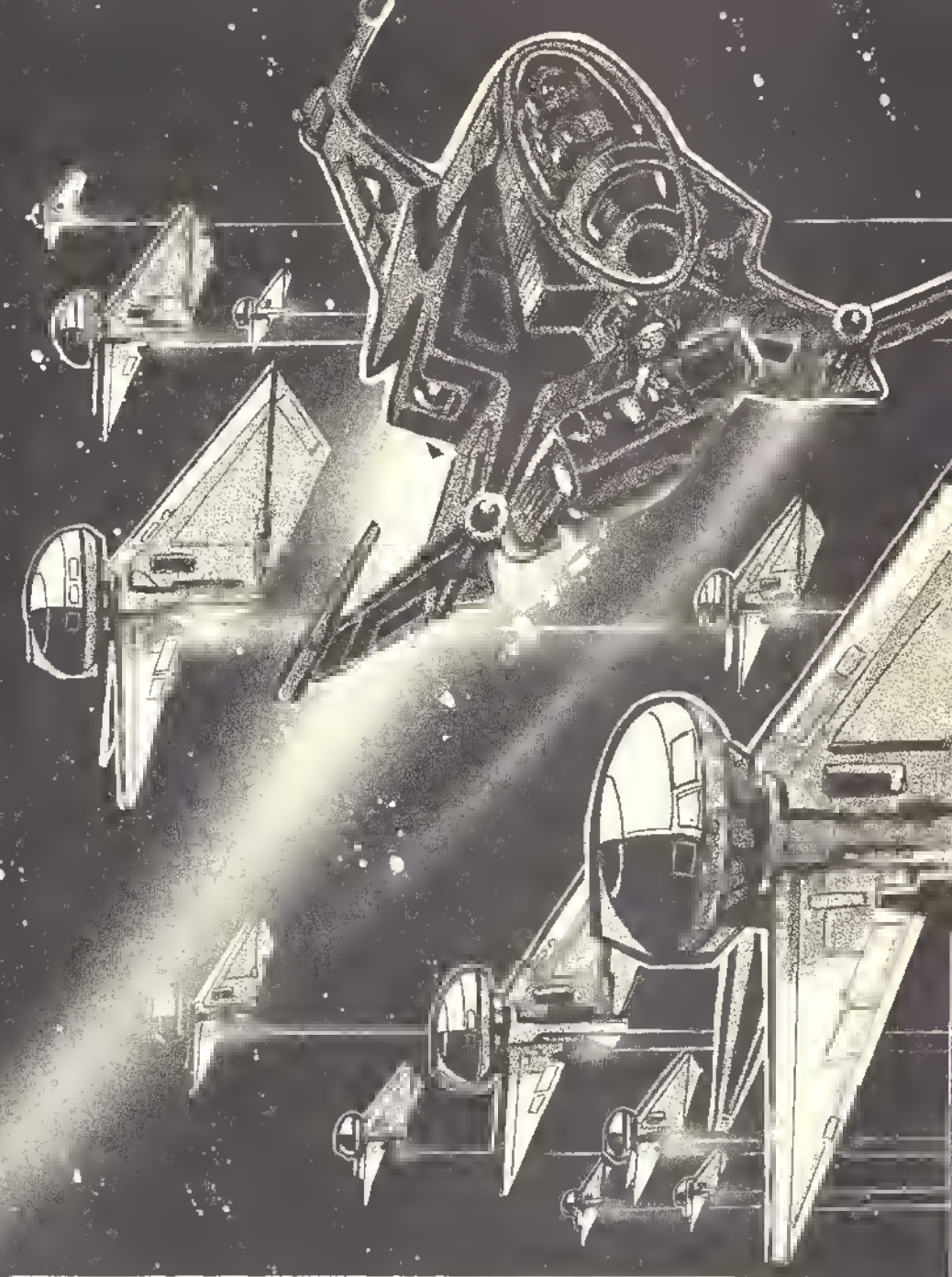
The next moment, he had skittered out of the formation which had slowed to let the Kyben craft overshoot, while the Earthmen decelerated to pick up maneuverability.

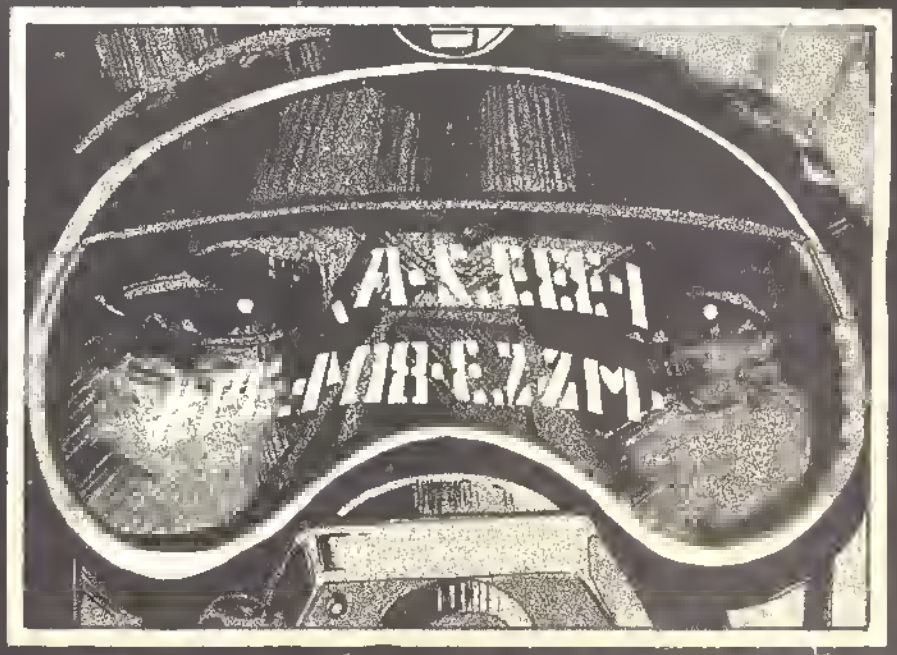
He had gone on at the old level and velocity, directly into the forward guns of a toadstool-shaped Kyben destroyer.

The first beam had burned the gun-mounts and directional equipment off the front of the ship, scorching down the aft side in a smear like ox[illegible] chrome plate. He had [illegible]aged to avoid the secon[illegible] beam.

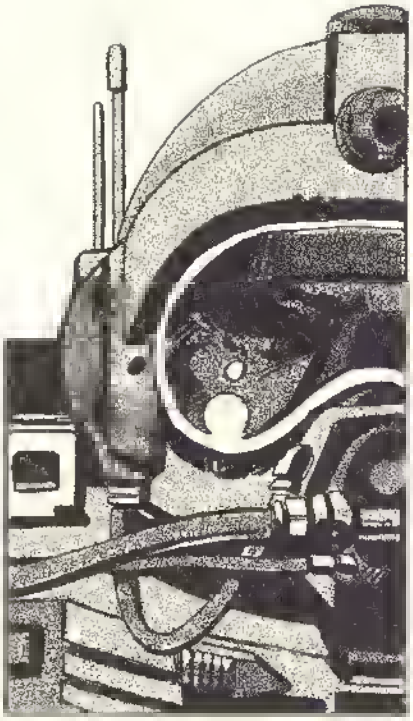
His radio contact had been brief; he was going to make it back to Antares-Base if he could. If not, the formation would be listening to his homing-beam from a life hutch on whatever planetoid he might find for a crash-landing.

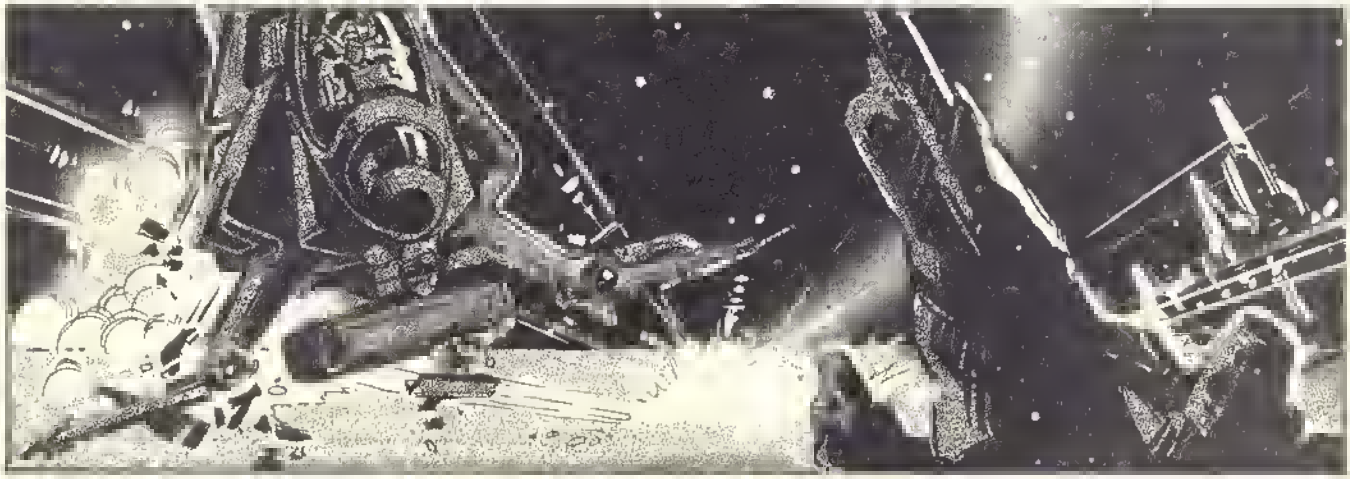
Which was what he had done. The charts had said the pebble spinning there was technically 1—333, 2—A, M & S, 3—804.39#, which would have meant nothing but three-dimensional coordinates had not the small # after the data indicated a life hutch somewhere on its surface.



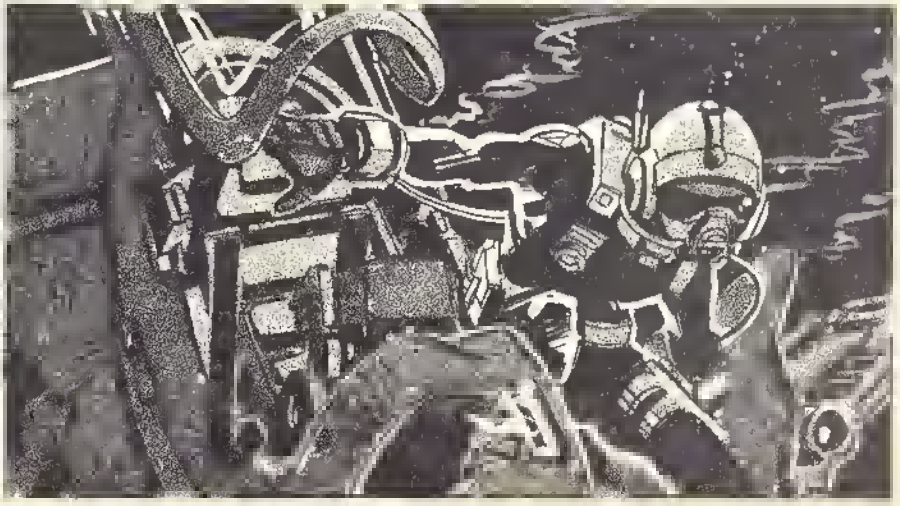


His distaste at being knocked out of the fighting, being forced onto one of the life hutch planetoids, had been offset only by his fear of running out of fuel before he could locate himself. Of eventually drifting off into space somewhere, to finally wind up as an artificial satellite around some minor sun.

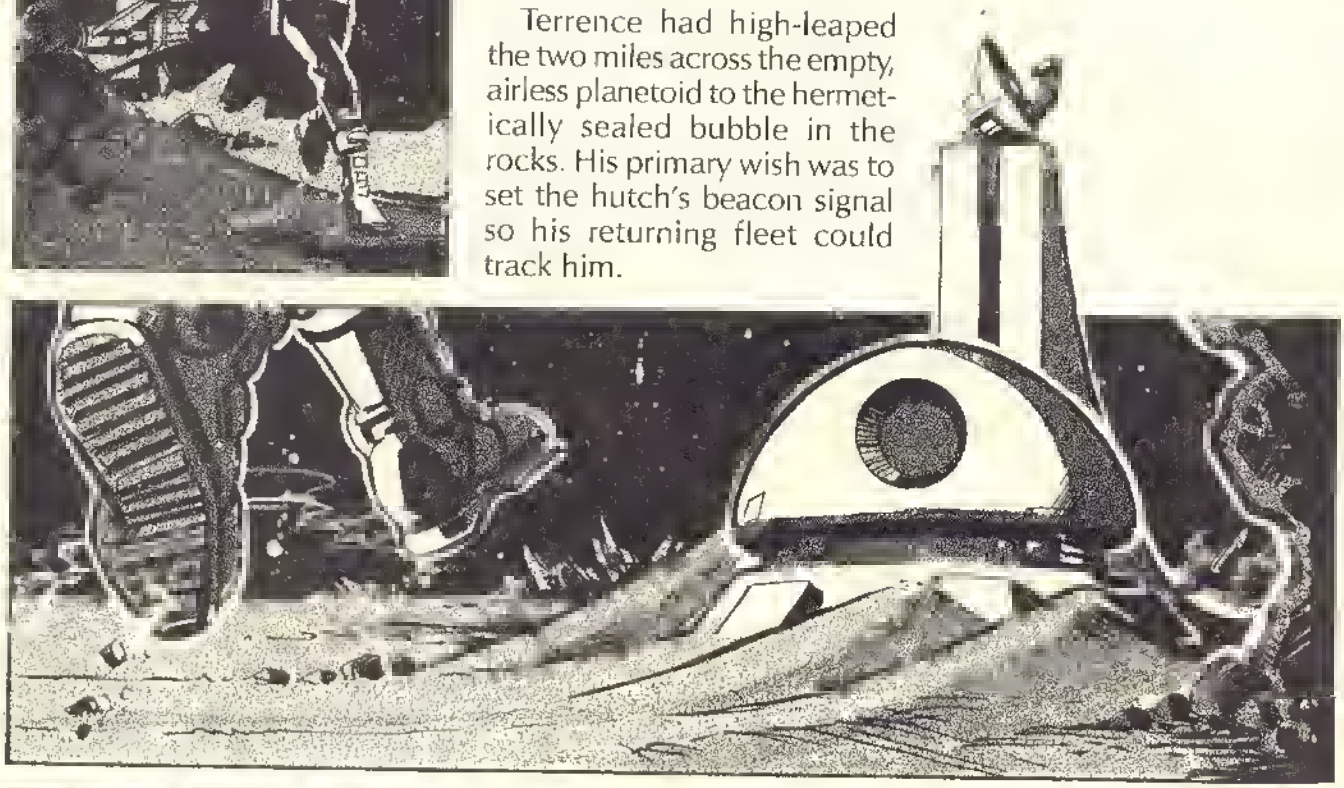


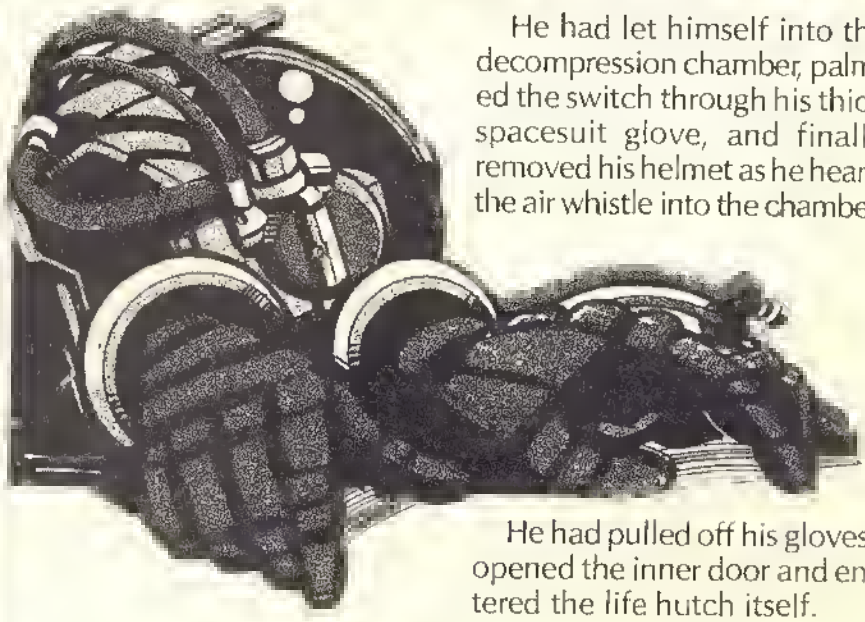


The ship pancaked in under minimal reverse drive, bounced high twice and caromed ten times, tearing out chunks of the rear section, but had come to rest a scant two miles from the life hutch, jammed into the rocks.



Terrence had high-leaped the two miles across the empty, airless planetoid to the hermetically sealed bubble in the rocks. His primary wish was to set the hutch's beacon signal so his returning fleet could track him.





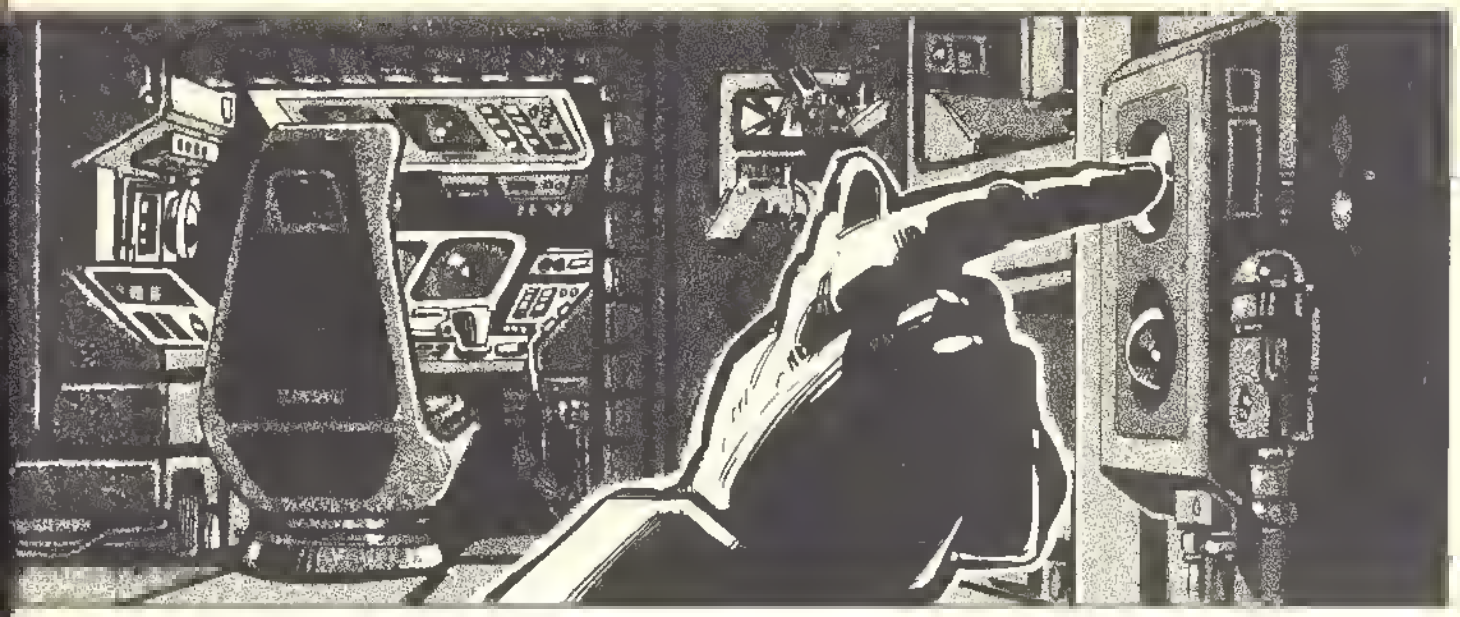
He had let himself into the decompression chamber, palmed the switch through his thick spacesuit glove, and finally removed his helmet as he heard the air whistle into the chamber.

He had pulled off his gloves, opened the inner door and entered the life hutch itself.

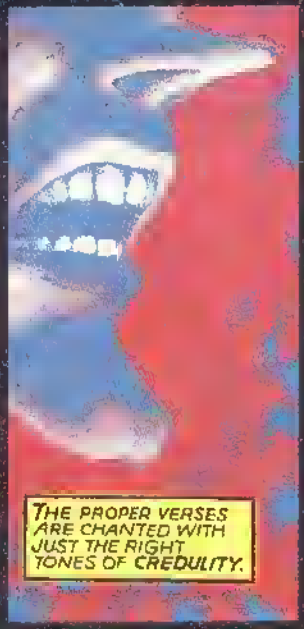
God bless you, little life hutch, Terrence had thought as he dropped the helmet and gloves. He had glanced around, noting the relay machines picking up messages from outside, sorting them, vectoring them off in other directions. He had seen the medicine chest clamped onto the wall, the refrigerator he knew would be well-stocked if a previous tenant hadn't been there before the stockman could refill it. He had seen the all-purpose robot, immobile in its duty-niche. And the wall-chronometer, its face smashed. All of it in a second's glance.

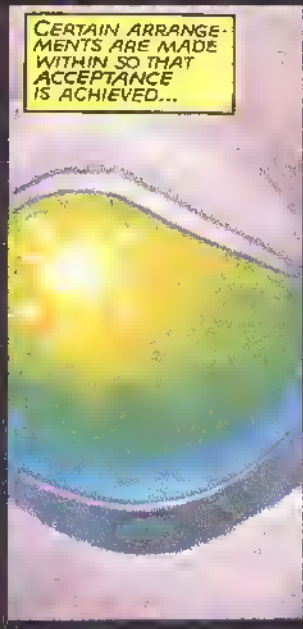
God bless, too, the gentlemen who thought up the idea of these little rescue stations, stuck all over the place for just such emergencies as this. He had started to walk across the room.

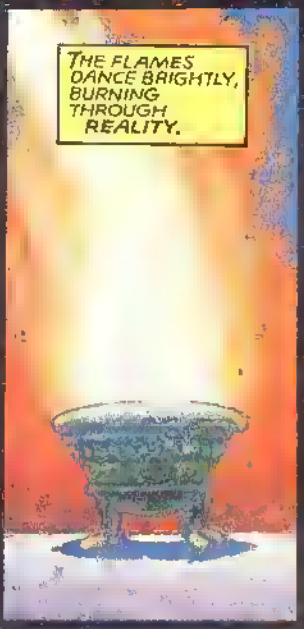
It was at this point that the service robot, that kept the place in repair between tenants and unloaded supplies from the ships, had moved clankingly across the floor, and with one fearful smash of a steel arm thrown Terrence across the room.



LIFE HUTCH continues on page 58







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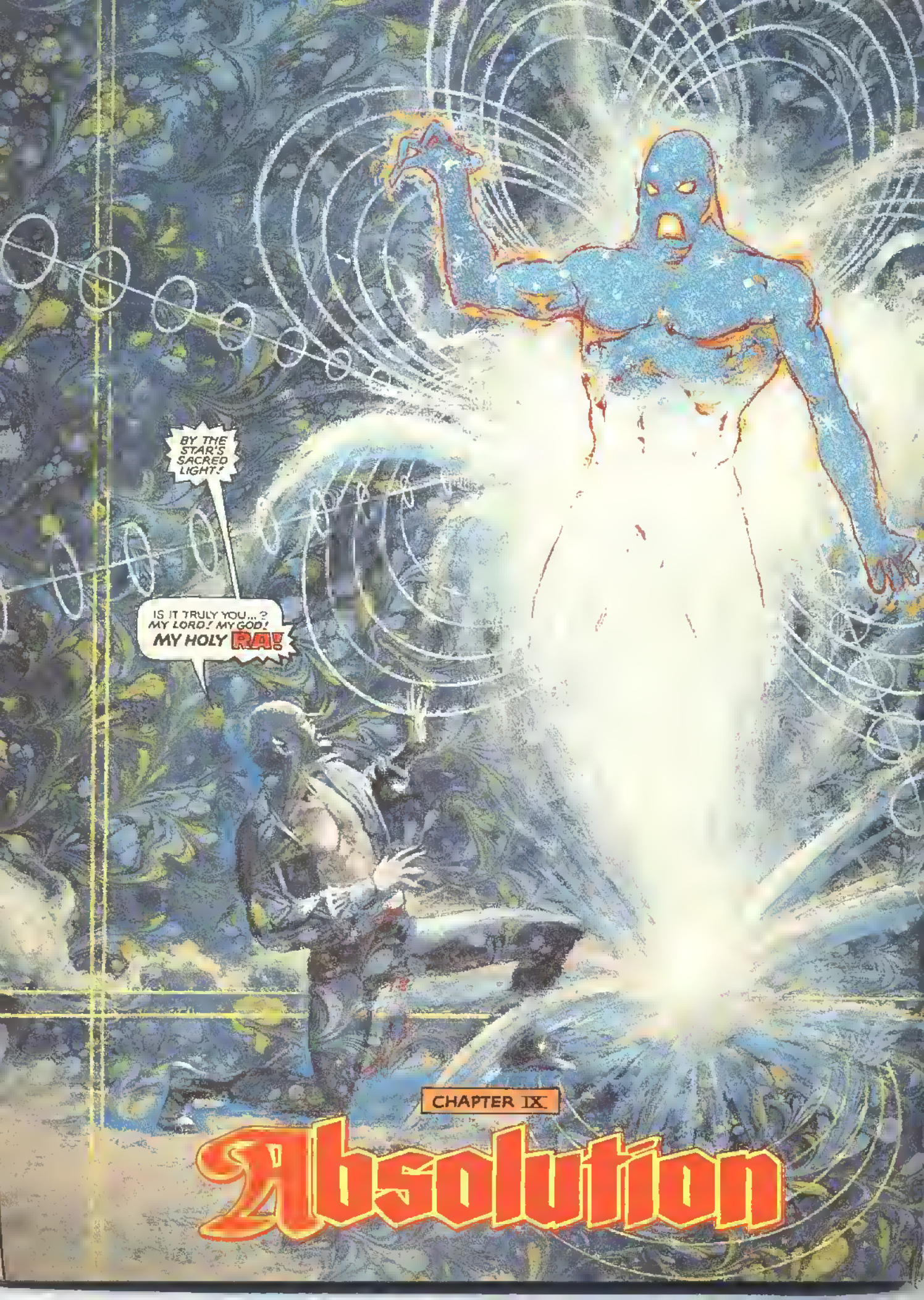
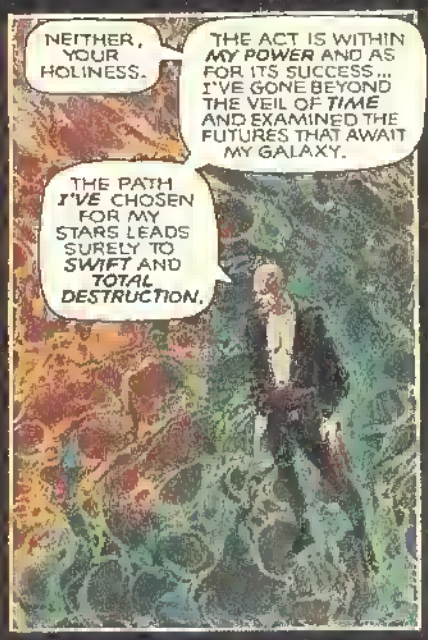
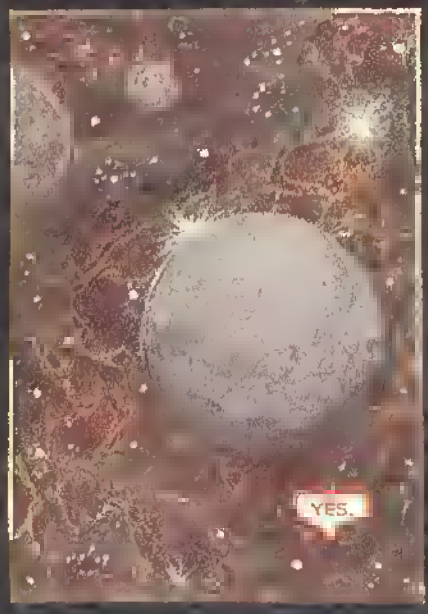

BY THE STAR'S SACRED LIGHT!
IS IT TRULY YOU...? MY LORD! MY GOD! MY HOLY RA!
CHAPTER IX
Absolution

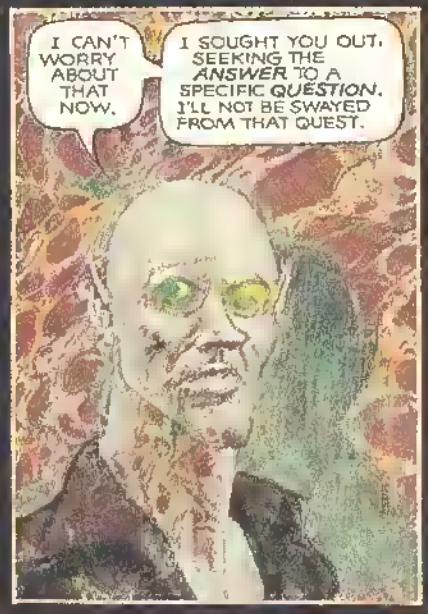
RA IS ONE OF THE MANY NAMES I ANSWER TO. TO SOME I AM SIMPLY CALLED GOD. TO OTHERS, I AM KNOWN AS BUDDHA, VELRAM, FANTASY, LOINTAN, POWER, RAWNER, LIFE, SELEPIC OR DEATH.
I ANSWER TO ANY OR ALL NAMES WHEN I CHOOSE.
BUT IN REALITY, I AM NAUGHT BUT FAITH AND OPPORTUNITY.
WHATEVER YOU BE, LORD RA, I REJOICE AT YOUR ANSWERING MY HUMBLE PLEA, FOR I'M SORELY IN NEED OF YOUR EXISTENCE AT THIS DARK MOMENT.
YOUR NEED IS MY REASON FOR EXISTENCE. HOW MAY RA SERVE HIS LAST WORSHIPPER?
BY GIVING GOOD COUNSEL TO YOUR WRETCHED SERVANT, MASTER.
GRAVE MATTERS OF A COSMIC SCALE WEIGH HEAVILY ON MY SOUL.
SURELY YOU MUST KNOW OF THE DREADFUL UNDERTAKING I HAVE BEEN FORCED TO SHOULDER.
IT IS THAT BURDEN WHICH BRINGS ME TO YOU... WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE AID OF A GOD I'VE NEVER TRULY BELIEVED IN BUT ON WHOM I MUST NOW DEPEND.
YES, I AM AWARE OF YOUR PLANS TO DESTROY WHAT YOU CALL THE MILKY WAY GALAXY AND ALL LIFE WITHIN IT IN THE NAME OF MERCY.
DO YOU COME TO ME NOW SEEKING ASSURANCES OF SUCCESS OR DO YOU WISH ME TO AID YOU IN YOUR LITTLE ACT OF CHARITY?


NEITHER, YOUR HOLINESS.
THE ACT IS WITHIN MY POWER AND AS FOR ITS SUCCESS... I'VE GONE BEYOND THE VEIL OF TIME AND EXAMINED THE FUTURES THAT AWAIT MY GALAXY.
THE PATH I'VE CHOSEN FOR MY STARS LEADS SURELY TO SWIFT AND TOTAL DESTRUCTION.

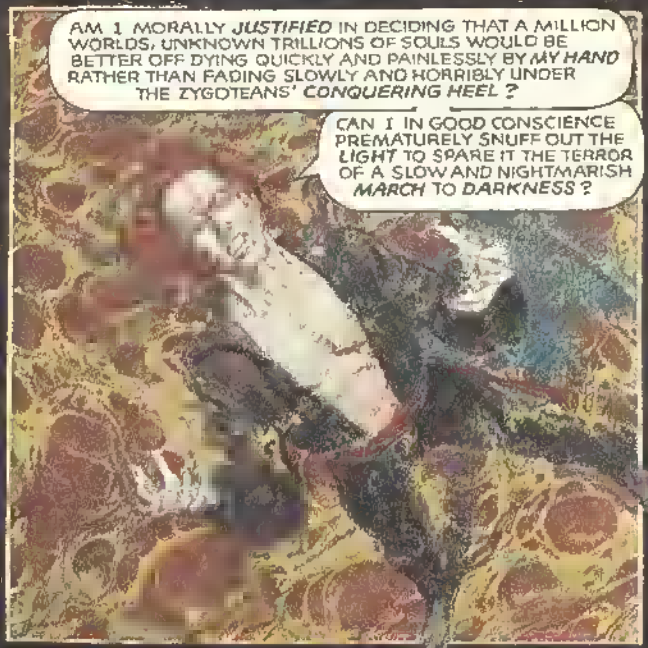
ARE YOU SO SURE OF YOUR POWERS, MORTAL, THAT YOU'VE BLINDED YOURSELF TO THE FACT THAT YOUR OWN ACTIONS MAY NOT HAVE CHANGED WHAT LIES BEYOND TOMORROW?
YOU CREATED A BEING OF VAST POTENTIAL WHEN YOU COUPLED THAT BYFREXIAN WITH YOUR FIERY SWORD. HE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN EITHER HE OR YOU SUSPECT.

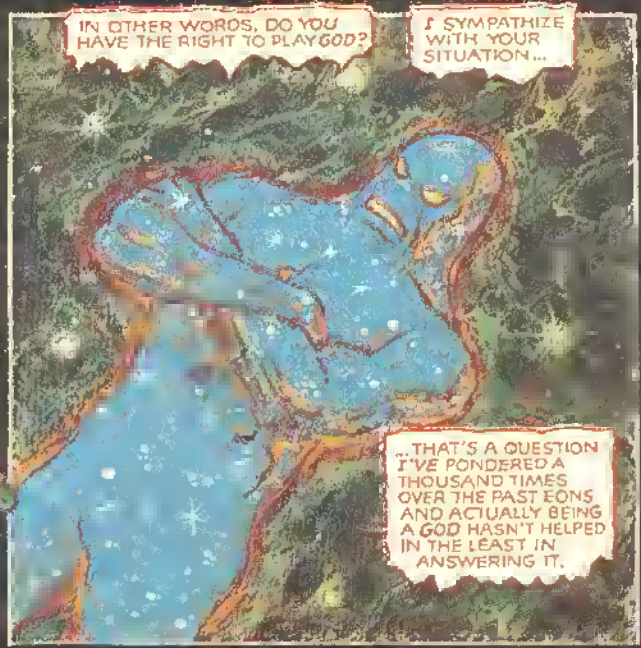
SUCH A FORCE IS A TREMENDOUS SOURCE OF CHANGE.
DO YOU MEAN HE HAS THE POWER TO THWART MY PLANS?


YES.


I CAN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW.
I SOUGHT YOU OUT, SEEKING THE ANSWER TO A SPECIFIC QUESTION. I'LL NOT BE SWAYED FROM THAT QUEST.

THE QUESTION, I ASSUME, IS, "DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO?"
YES, EXACTLY.


AM I MORALLY JUSTIFIED IN DECIDING THAT A MILLION WORLDS, UNKNOWN TRILLIONS OF SOULS WOULD BE BETTER OFF DYING QUICKLY AND PAINLESSLY BY MY HAND RATHER THAN FADING SLOWLY AND HORRIBLY UNDER THE ZYGOTEANS' CONQUERING HEEL?
CAN I IN GOOD CONSCIENCE PREMATURELY SNUFF OUT THE LIGHT TO SPARE IT THE TERROR OF A SLOW AND NIGHTMARISH MARCH TO DARKNESS?


IN OTHER WORDS, DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY GOD?
I SYMPATHIZE WITH YOUR SITUATION...
...THAT'S A QUESTION I'VE PONDERED A THOUSAND TIMES OVER THE PAST EONS AND ACTUALLY BEING A GOD HASN'T HELPED IN THE LEAST IN ANSWERING IT.

THEN YOU'VE NO ANSWER FOR ME?
YOU SEEK ILLUMINATION TO A QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE. WE GODS HAVE NEVER BEEN VERY COMFORTABLE IN THAT AREA.
WE'RE BETTER SUITED TO WEIGHTIER PROBLEMS. MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE WE'VE ALWAYS LEFT FOR MAN TO HANDLE.
THEN WHAT AM I TO DO?! WHO CAN I GO TO FOR GUIDANCE?!
I WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOU LOOK TO YOURSELF FOR WISE COUNSEL. FOR HASN'T THAT BEEN THE ONLY SOURCE OF JUDGMENT YOU'VE EVER TRULY TRUSTED?
WHY, AT THIS LATE DATE, DO YOU DRAG RELIGION INTO THOSE THINGS THAT ARE YOURS AND YOURS ALONE TO DECIDE?
WHY DO YOU BOTHER DYING GODS WITH YOUR PETTY PROBLEMS?
I GUESS BECAUSE I'M MORTAL AND FALLIBLE.
BECAUSE... I'M NOT SURE THAT I'M RIGHT.
THEN PERHAPS ALL YOU TRULY SEEK IS CLARITY. WERE NOT YOUR GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE GAINED BY THE USE OF FORBIDDEN DRUGS AND POWERFUL MAGICS?
PERHAPS IT WAS THE SURREAL ASPECT OF THESE VISIONS THAT HAVE CAUSED YOUR DOUBT AND SHAKEN YOUR DETERMINATION?
MIGHT NOT A CLEAR, DIRECT VIEW OF TOMORROW'S TOMORROW DECIDE YOUR COURSE?
YES, I GUESS IT MIGHT.
SO BE IT. THEN.
LOOK UPON ALL THE MYRIAD FUTURES.

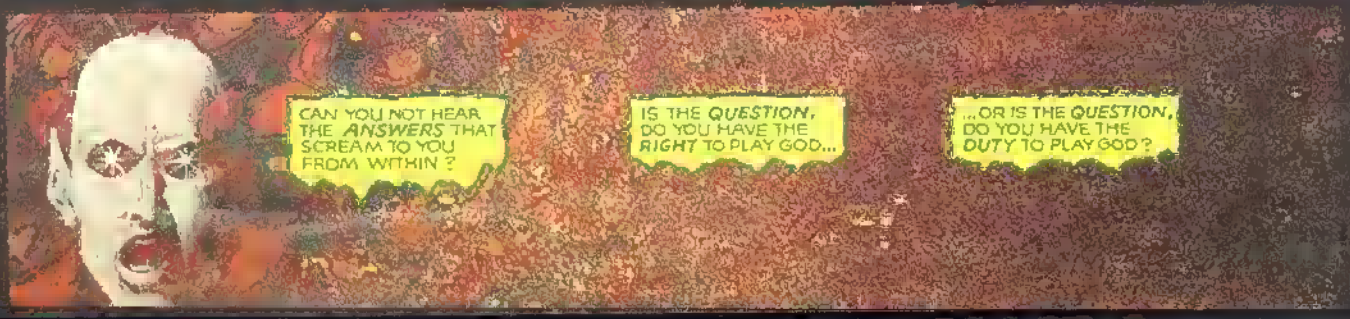
LOOK ONCE AGAIN AT THE ENDLESS LINE OF DEAD AND GUTTED *GRAVEYARDS* THAT DOT THE ZYGOTEANS' FUTURE PASSING.

FACE *COSMIC DOOM* SO HORRENDOUS THAT EVEN THE HEAVENS SHUDDER AT ITS DISTORTED VISAGE.

WITNESS THE FRUITS OF FUTURES *NOT* OF YOUR MAKING. SEE THE PORTRAITS OF POSSIBILITY THAT BEAR NOT *YOUR SIGNATURE*.

YOU QUESTION THE *DIVINITY* OF YOUR PURPOSE AND HOLD THE POWER TO *ESCAPE* THE HELL THAT IS THE FUTURE IN ONE HAND WHILE YOU *BLIND* YOURSELF WITH THE OTHER.

DO YOU TRULY BELIEVE THE *STARS* WOULD GRANT YOU THE OPTION OF *PUSHING* THEM QUICKLY THROUGH DEATH'S DOOR IF THEY PREFERRED *CRAWLING* ON THEIR BELLIES TO THAT SAME PORTAL?



FAREWELL, LORD AKNATON. IF GODS TRULY EXIST I PRAY THEY AID YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY.

IT'S OVER... *RA'S* GONE... I AM ALONE AGAIN.

BUT WAS I TRULY EVER ANYTHING OTHER THAN *ALONE*?

DID I TRULY *MEET* MY GOD, OR DID THE PASSION OF MY FEAR MERELY CONJURE UP A DEITY OF *REASSURANCE* TO AID ME THROUGH THESE *FINAL HOURS*?

I'VE NO PROOF *RA* WAS HERE. MY OWN WORD IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE IN THIS MATTER, FOR THE STARS THIS DAY WHISPER OF AKNATON'S *DARK MADNESS*.

MY SURROUNDINGS OFFER NO PROOF OF A *DIVINE VISITATION*.

THERE'S NOT A FOOTPRINT, BURNING BUSH OR LINGERING NIMBUS TO BE SEEN.

ONLY TWO INTANGIBLE TRACES REMAIN OF RA'S HOLY PASSING.

ONE: THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE *INFINITY HORN* AWAITS ME IN A SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLE ON THE WORLD APPROPRIATELY CALLED *DREAMSEND*.

TWO: THE UNSHAKEABLE *CONVICTION* WHICH SURGES THROUGH EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING THAT THAT WHICH I AM ABOUT TO DO IS *JUST*.

NIETH, MY LOVE, I COME TO JOIN YOU THIS DAY...

...BUT I *WON'T* BE COMING *ALONE*.

THERE HE IS! JUST LIKE YOU PREDICTED, WHIS'PAR.

ANK! YOU AND I HAVE GOT THINGS TO TALK ABOUT!

UH-OH! LOOKS LIKE TROUBLE BREWING!

I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING ANKATON CAN'T HANDLE.

WHIS'PAR'S BEEN FILLING ME IN ON YOUR PLANS WHILE YOU WERE GONE!

REALLY?

YES, AND THERE SEEM TO BE A FEW THINGS YOU FORGOT TO MENTION TO ME!

SUCH AS?

SUCH AS THE FACT THAT YOUR REMEDY FOR GETTING RID OF THE ZYGS INVOLVES BLOWING UP MY GALAXY!

AND YOU QUESTION THE WISDOM OF SUCH A MOVE, IS THAT IT?

WELL, YOU WOULDN'T BE SO FOOLISH IF YOU SAW THE TRUE FACE OF ZYGOTEISM.

SO I GUESS THE TIME HAS COME FOR JUST THAT.

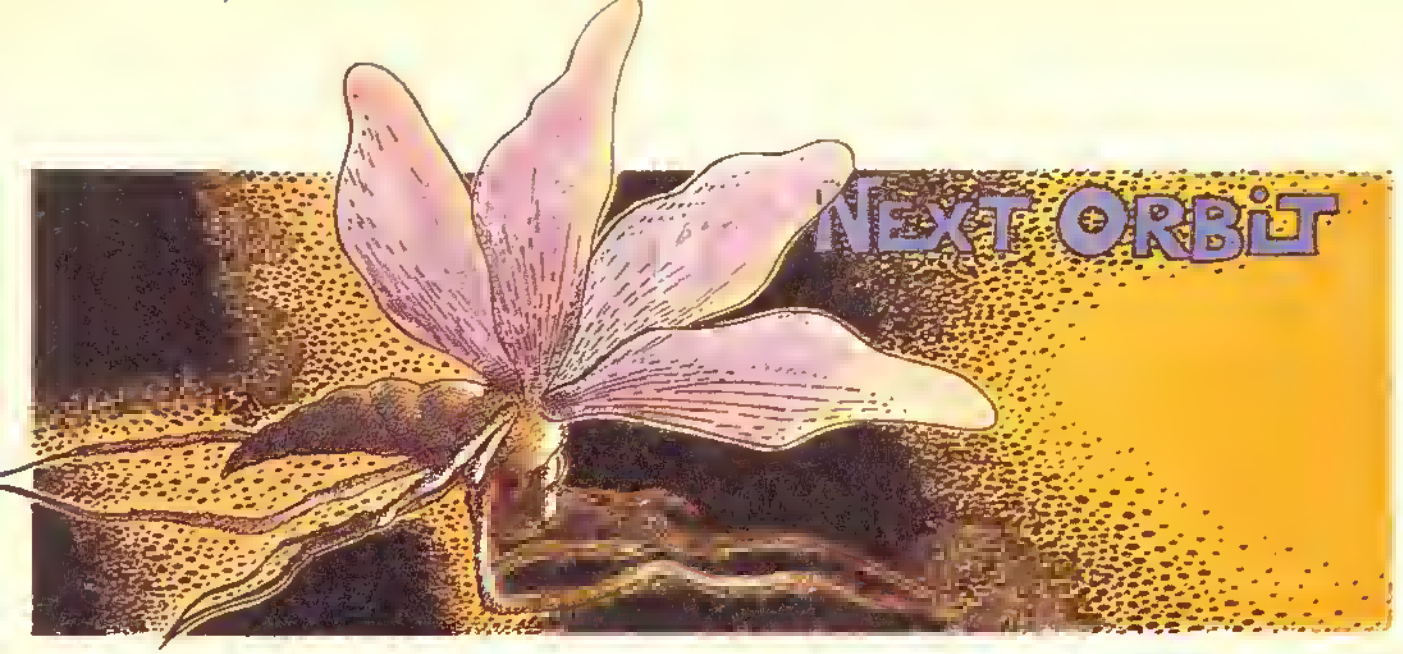
LOOK... LOOK DEEP INTO MY EYES... INTO MY SOUL... ALL OF YOU.

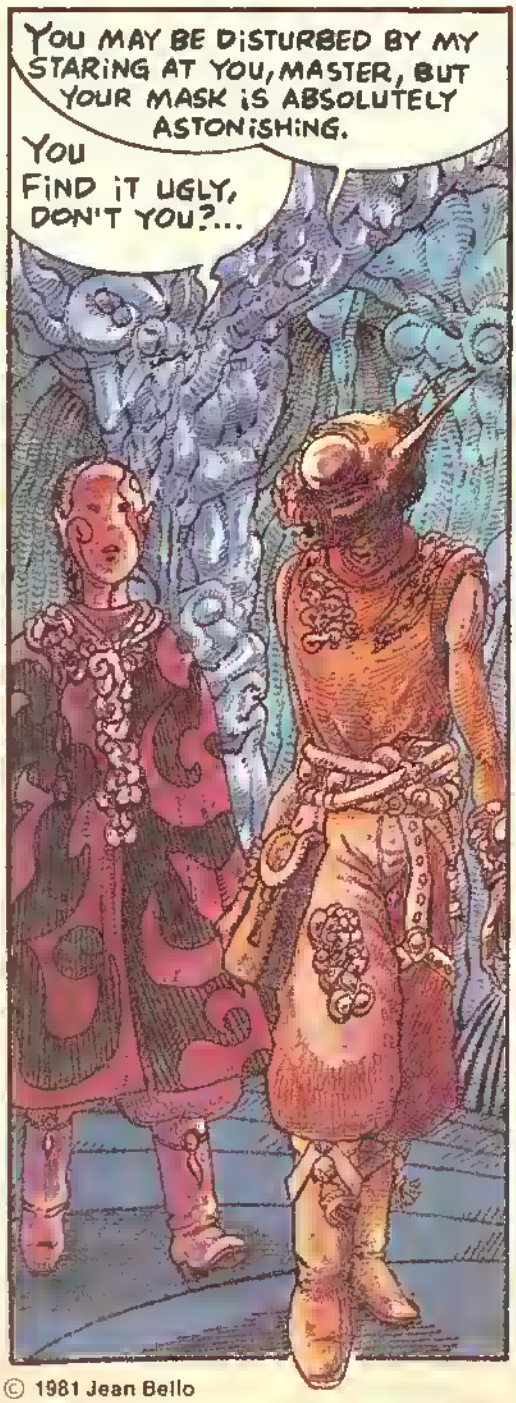
LOOK AND SEE WHAT I'VE SEEN IN THE PAST AND IN THE FUTURE.

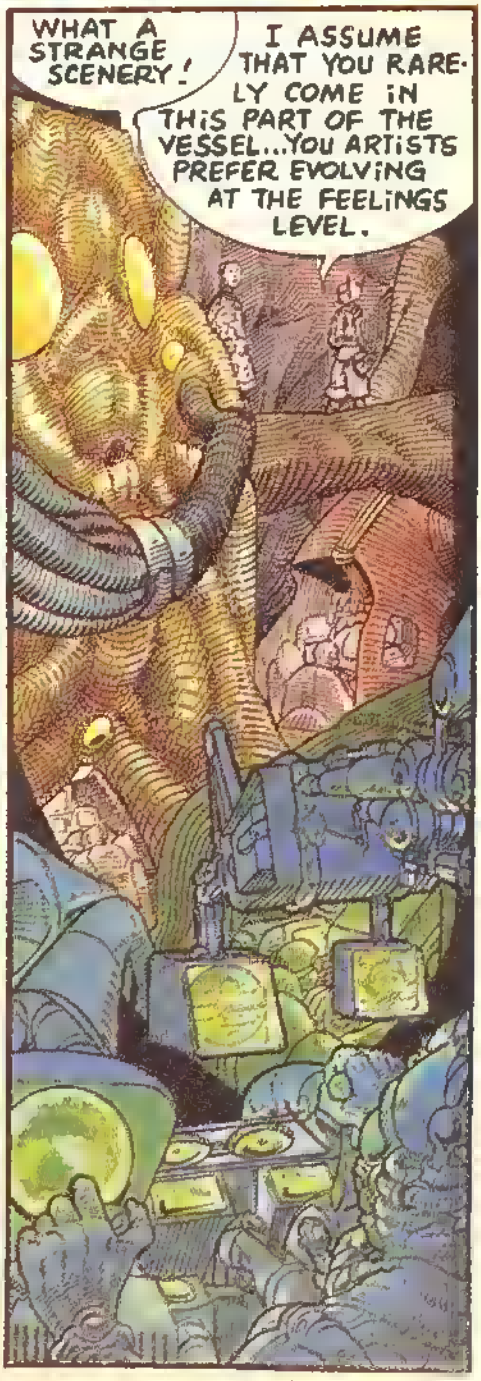
LOOK AT THE HORROR WHICH IS THE ZYGOTEAN LEGACY.

LOOK AT YOUR ALTERNATIVE TO DEATH.

METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY continues next issue

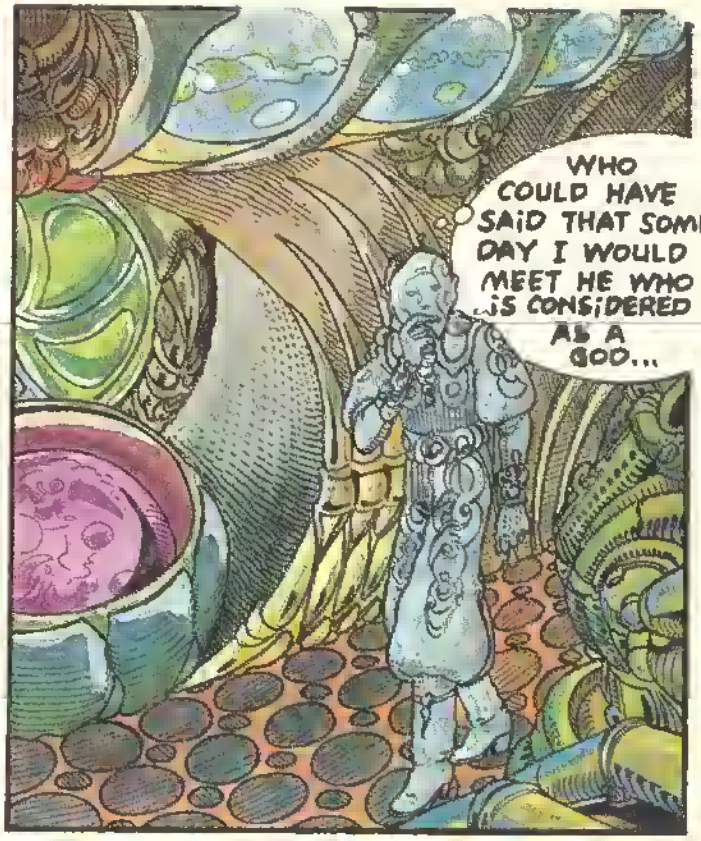


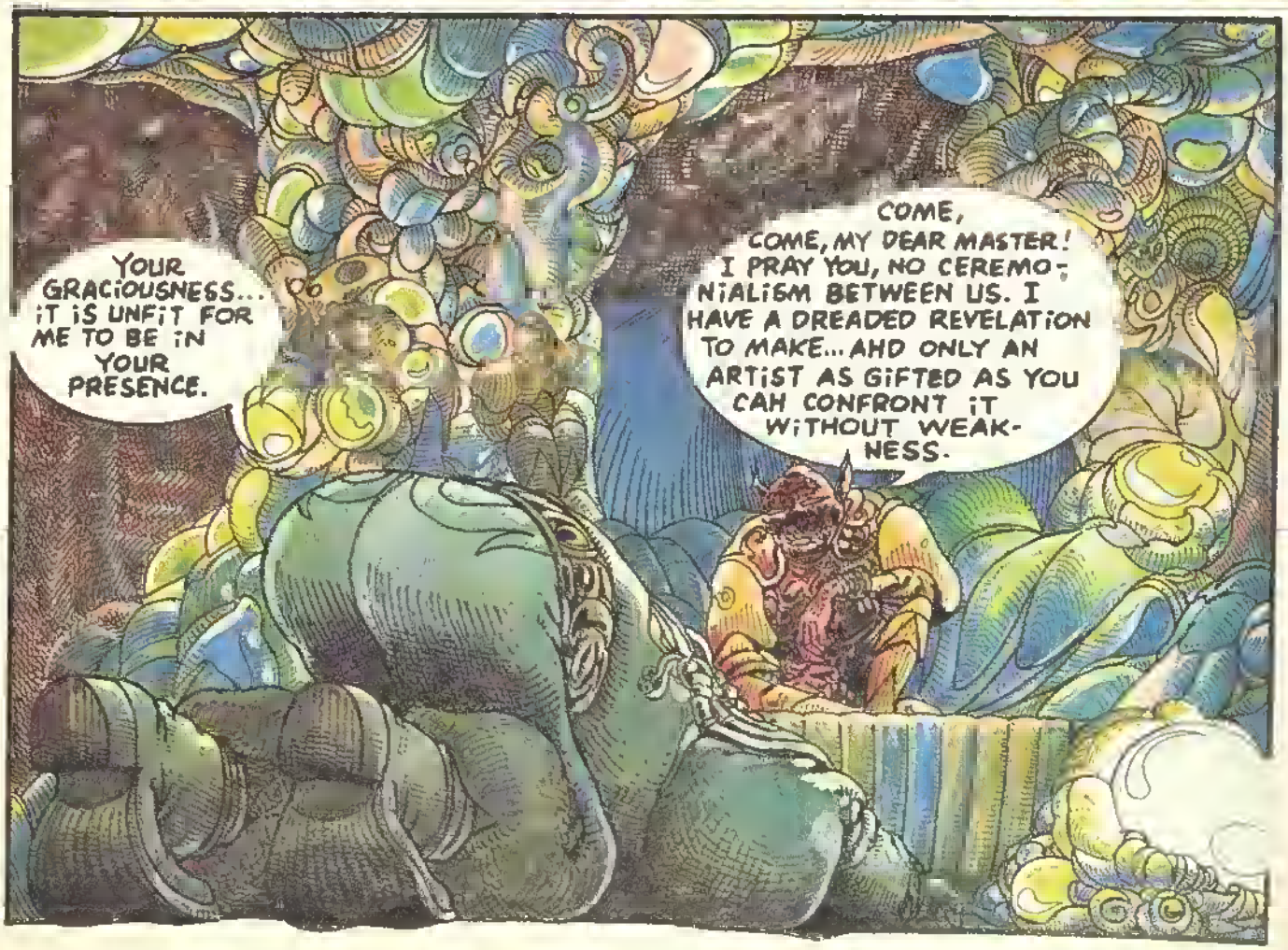


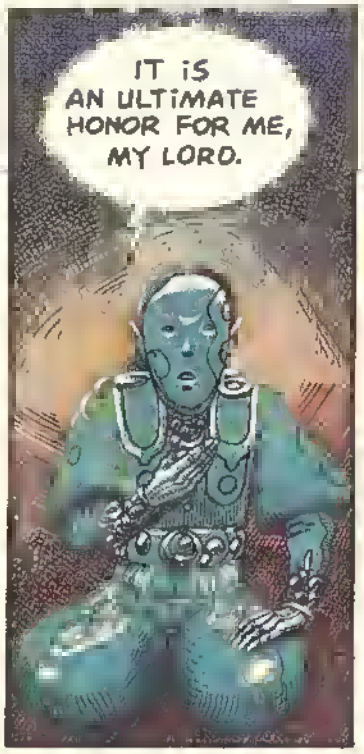


© 1981 Jean Bello

HIS CAVERN IS AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR.
THANK YOU, BROTHER!

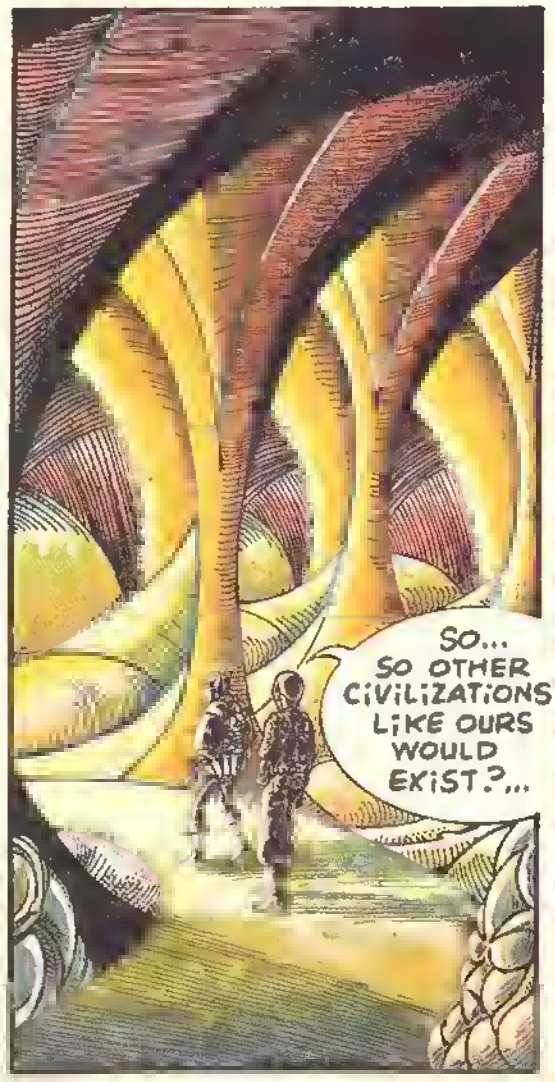

WHO COULD HAVE SAID THAT SOME-DAY I WOULD MEET HE WHO IS CONSIDERED AS A GOD...

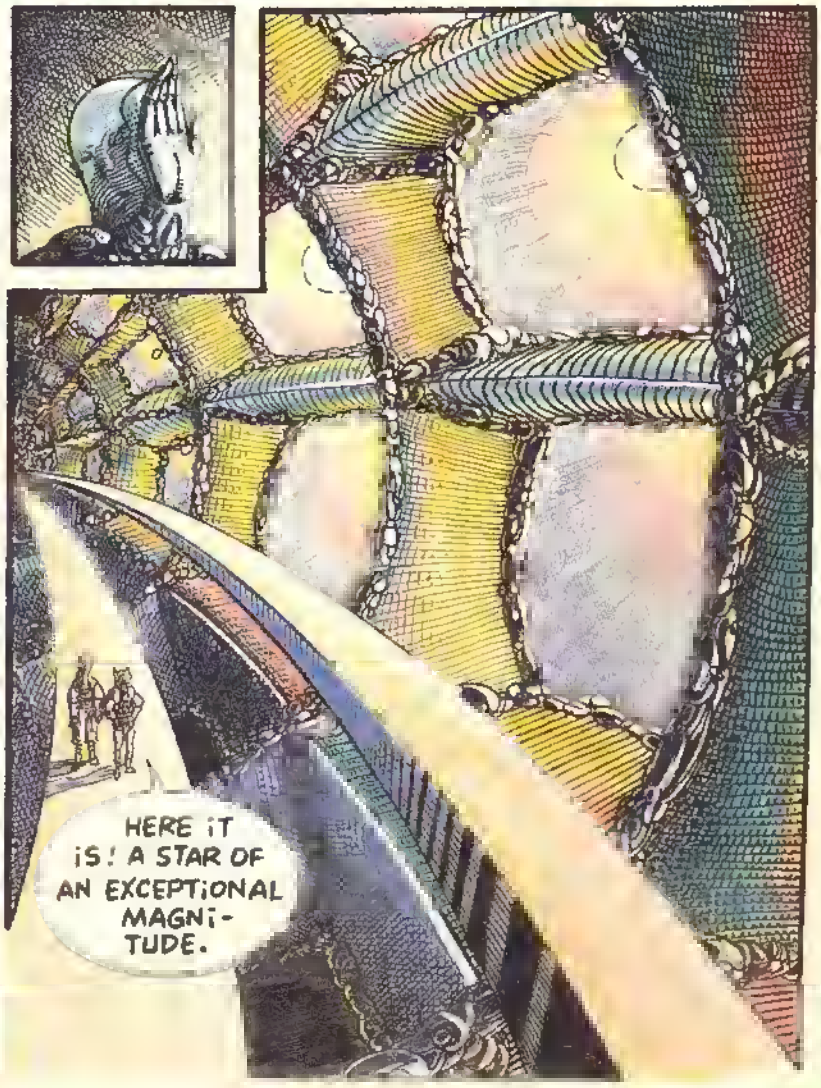

YOUR GRACIOUSNESS... IT IS UNFIT FOR ME TO BE IN YOUR PRESENCE.
COME, COME, MY DEAR MASTER! I PRAY YOU, NO CEREMO-NIALISM BETWEEN US. I HAVE A DREADED REVELATION TO MAKE... AND ONLY AN ARTIST AS GIFTED AS YOU CAN CONFRONT IT WITHOUT WEAK-NESS.


IT IS AN ULTIMATE HONOR FOR ME, MY LORD.

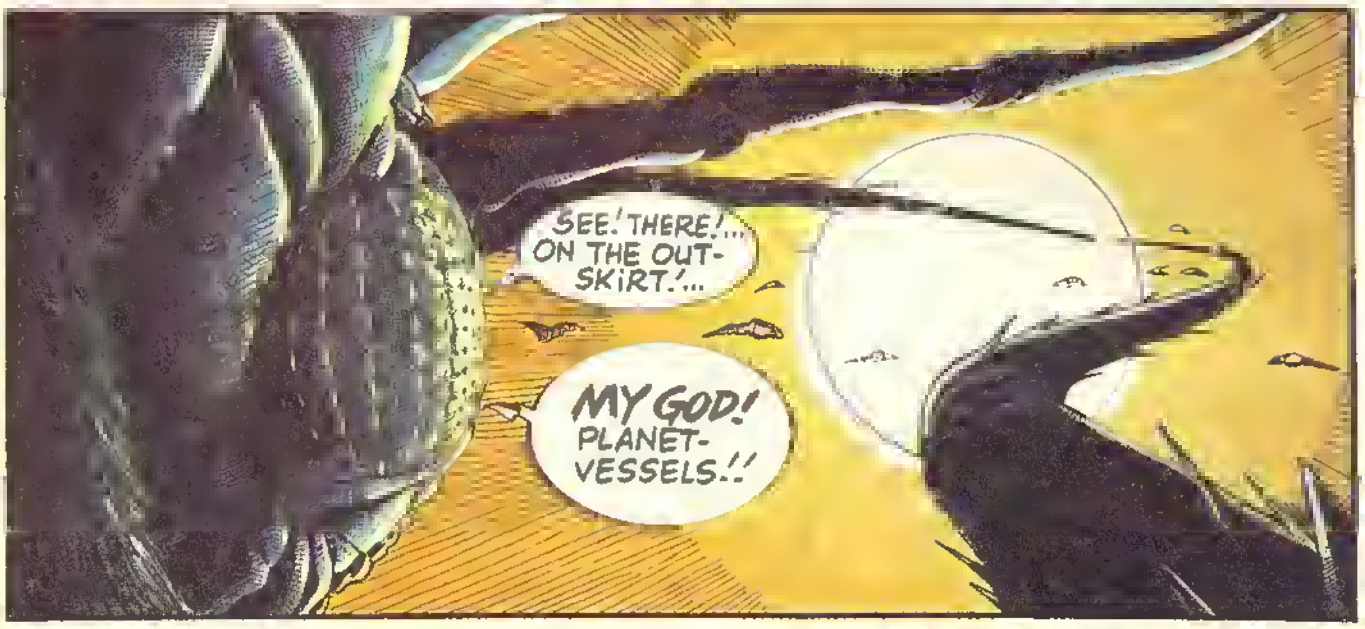
AS YOU KNOW I HAVE FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN SAILING OUR PLANET-VESSEL ACROSS UNEXPLORED SPACE. FURTHERMORE, SOON WE WILL BE IN ORBIT.

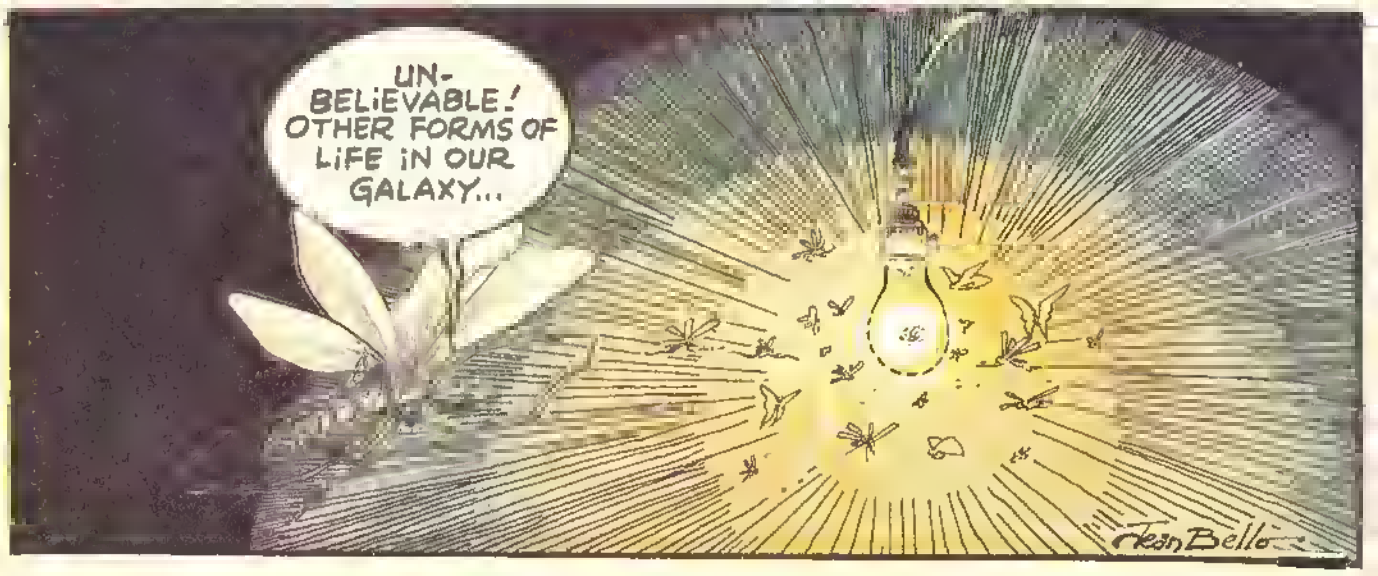
WE SUSPECTED THE PRESENCE OF OTHER FORMS OF LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE. ANCIENT DOCUMENTS TELL ABOUT MANY OTHER PLANET-VESSELS SIMILAR TO OURS ORBITING UNCHARTED STARS...
WELL, I NOW OBTAIN THAT PROOF!


SO... SO OTHER CIVILIZATIONS LIKE OURS WOULD EXIST?...

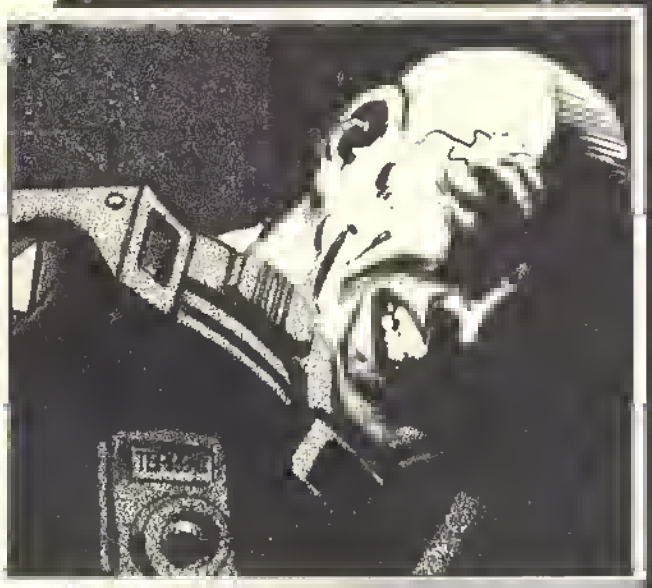

HERE IT IS! A STAR OF AN EXCEPTIONAL MAGNITUDE.

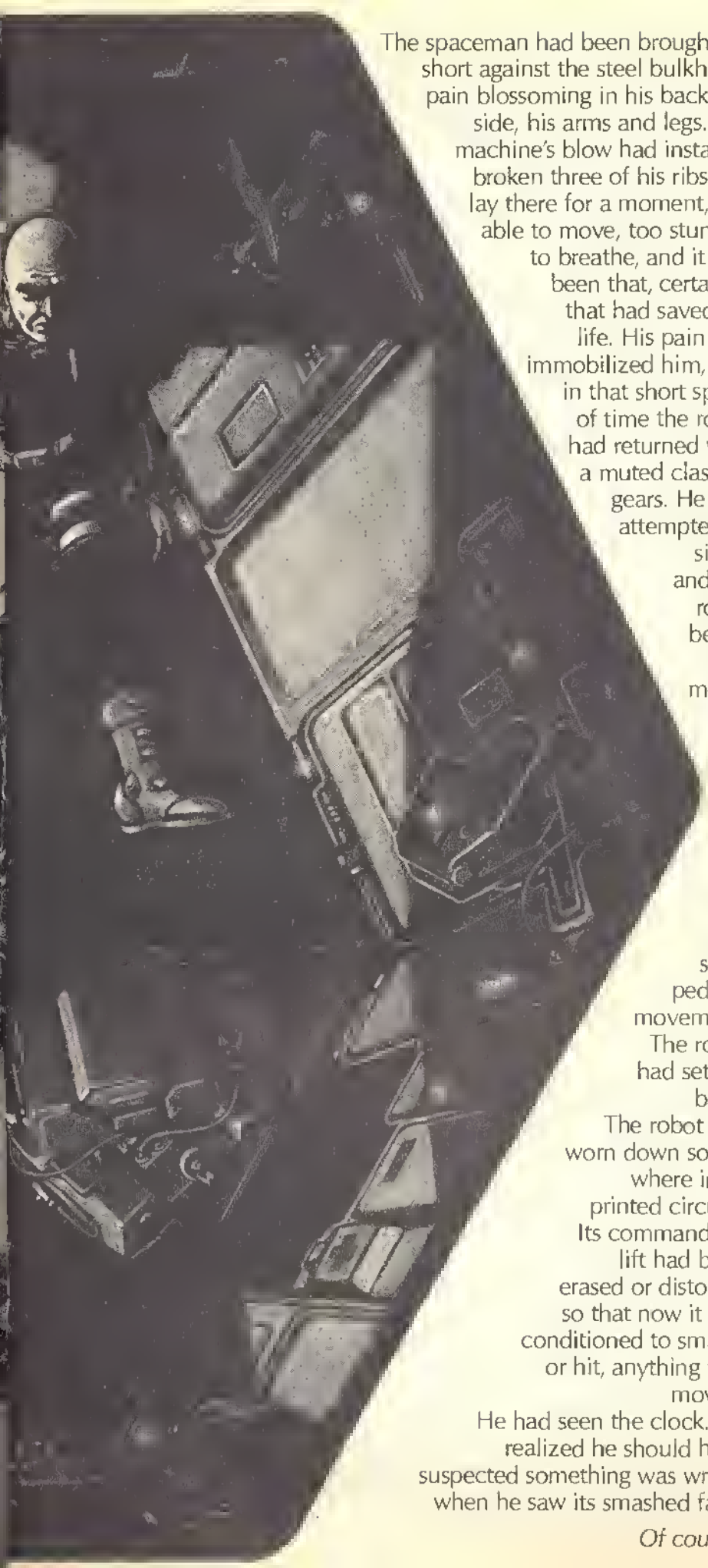
WHAT AN EXALTING SIGHT!


SEE! THERE!... ON THE OUT-SKIRT!...
MY GOD! PLANET-VESSELS!!


UN-BELIEVABLE! OTHER FORMS OF LIFE IN OUR GALAXY...
Jean Bello

LIFE HUTCH
(continued from
page 43)





The spaceman had been brought up short against the steel bulkhead, pain blossoming in his back, his side, his arms and legs. The machine's blow had instantly broken three of his ribs. He lay there for a moment, unable to move, too stunned to breathe, and it had been that, certainly, that had saved his life. His pain had immobilized him, and in that short space of time the robot had returned with a muted clash of gears. He had attempted to sit up and the robot began to move.

He had stopped the movement. The robot had settled back.

The robot had worn down somewhere in its printed circuits. Its commands to lift had been erased or distorted so that now it was conditioned to smash, or hit, anything that moved.

He had seen the clock. He realized he should have suspected something was wrong when he saw its smashed face.

Of course!

The digital dials had moved, the robot had smashed the clock. Terrence had moved, the robot had smashed him.

And would again, if he moved again.

But for the unnoticeable movement of his eyelids, he had not moved in three days.

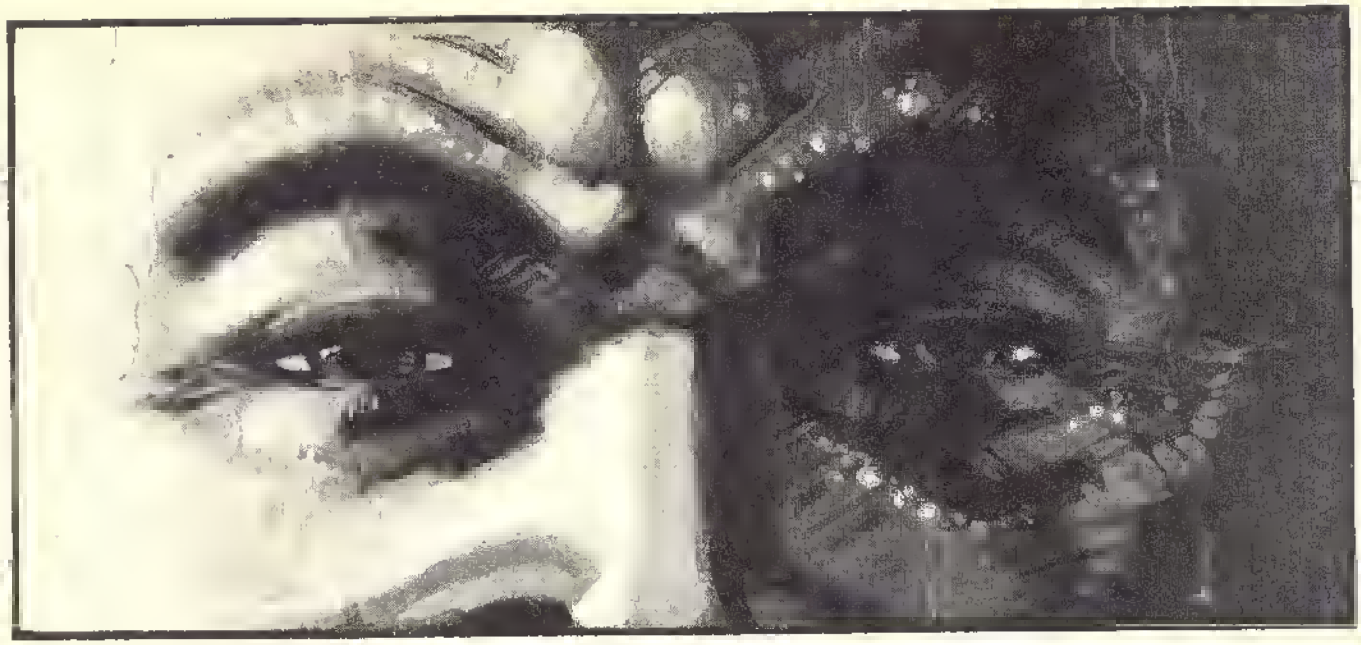
He had tried moving toward the decompression lock, stopping when the robot advanced and letting it settle back, then moving again, a little nearer. But the idea died with his first movement. His ribs were too painful. The pain was terrible. He was locked in one position, an uncomfortable, twisted position, and he would be there till the stalemate ended, one way or the other.

He was suddenly alert again. The reliving of his last three days brought back reality sharply.

He was twelve feet away from the communications panel, twelve feet away from the beacon that would guide his rescuers to him. Before he died of his wounds, before he starved to death, before the robot crushed him. It could have been twelve light-years, for all the nearer he could get to it.

What had gone wrong with the robot? Time to think was cheap. The robot could detect movement, but thinking was still possible. Not that it could help, but it was possible.

The companies that supplied the life hutch's needs were all government contracted. Somewhere along the line someone had thrown in impure steel or calibrated the circuit-cutting machines for a less expensive job. Somewhere along the line someone had not run the robot through its paces correctly. Somewhere along the line someone had committed murder.



He opened his eyes again. Only the barest fraction of opening. Any more and the robot would sense the movement of his eyelids. That would be fatal.

Three days had left him weak and dizzy from hunger. His head was light and his eyes burned steadily. He had been lying in his own filth till he no longer noticed the discomfort. His side ached and throbbed, and the pain of a blast furnace roared through him every time he breathed.

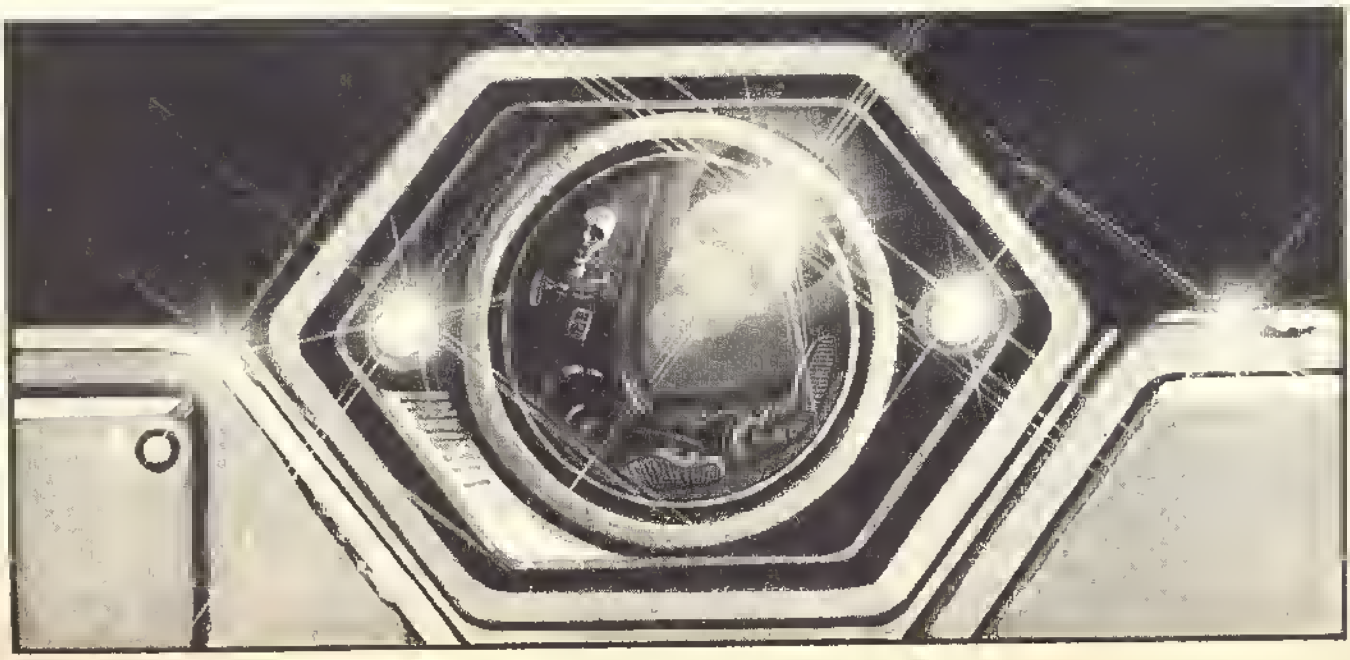
He thanked God his spacesuit was still on, lest the movement of his breathing bring the robot down on him. There was only one solution, and that solution was his death. He was almost delirious.

He looked at the machine.

It was not, strictly speaking, a robot. It was merely a remote-controlled hunk of jointed steel, invaluable for making beds, stacking steel plating, watching culture dishes, unloading spaceships and sucking dirt from rugs. The robot body, roughly humanoid, but without what would have been a head on a human, was merely an appendage.

The real brain, a complex maze of plastic screens and printed circuits, was behind the wall. It would have been too dangerous to install those delicate parts in a heavy-duty mechanism. It was too easy for the robot to drop itself from a loading shaft, or be hit by a meteorite, or get caught under a wrecked spaceship. So there were sensitive units in the robot appendage that "saw" and "heard" what was going on, and relayed them to the brain —behind the wall.

And somewhere along the line that brain had worn grooves too deeply into its circuits. It was now mad. Not mad in any way a human being



might go mad, for there were an infinite number of ways a machine could go insane. Just mad enough to kill Terrence.

Even if I could hit the robot with something, it wouldn't stop the thing. He could perhaps throw something at the machine before it could get to him, but it would do no good. The robot brain would still be intact, and the appendage would continue to function. It was hopeless.

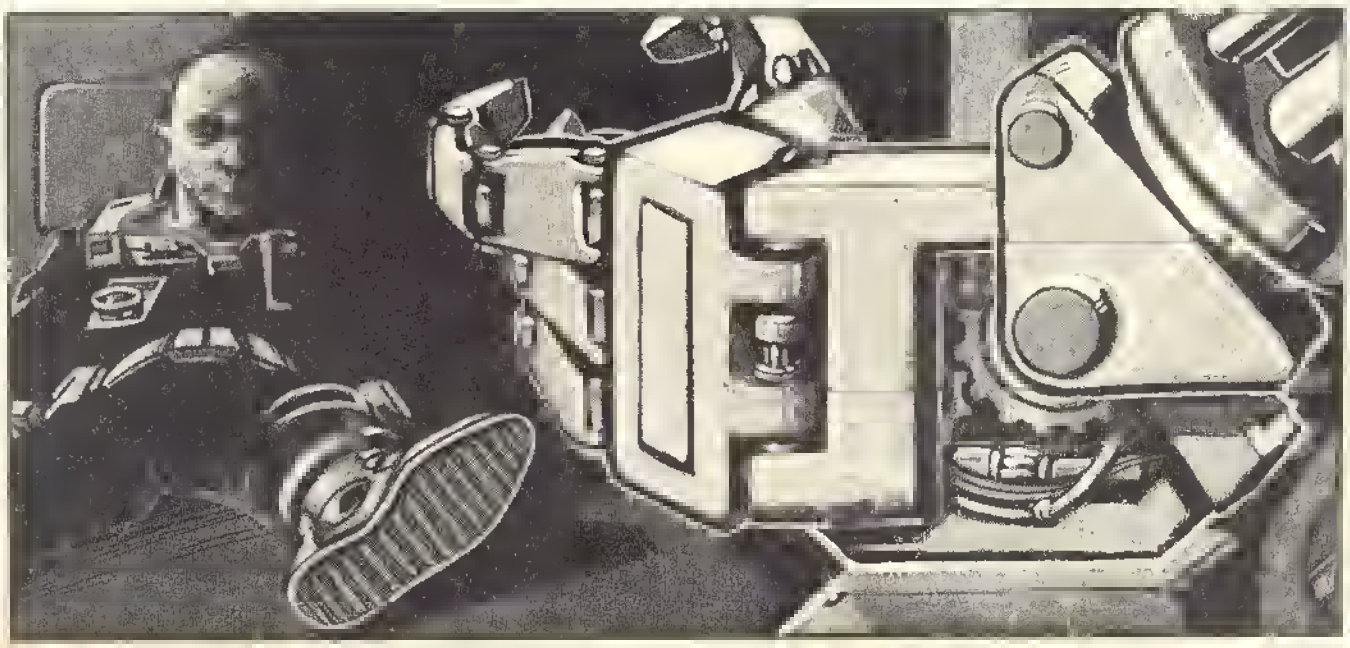
He stared at the massive, blocky hands of the robot. It seemed he could see his own blood on the jointed work-tool fingers of one hand. He knew it must be his imagination, but the idea persisted. He flexed the fingers of his hidden hand.

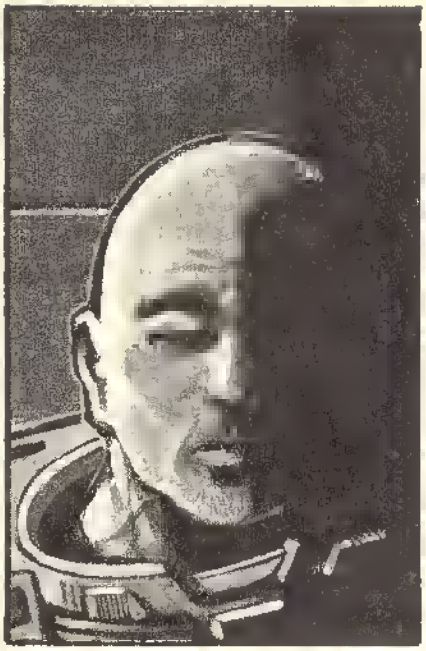
Several times during the past day—as well as he could gauge night and day without a clock or a sunrise—he had heard the roar of the fleet landing outside. Then he had realized there was no sound in dead space. Then he had realized they were all inside the relay machines, coming through subspace right into the life hutch. Then he had realized that such a thing was not possible. Then he came to his senses and realized all that had gone before was hallucination.

Then he had awakened and known it *was* real. He *was* trapped, and there was no way out. Death had come to live with him. He was going to die.

Terrence had never been a coward, nor had he been a hero. He was one of the men who fight wars because they are always fought by *some*one. He was the kind of man who would allow himself to be torn from wife and home and flung into an abyss they called Space to defend what he had been told needed defense. But it was in moments like this that a man like Terrence began to think.

Why here? Why like this?



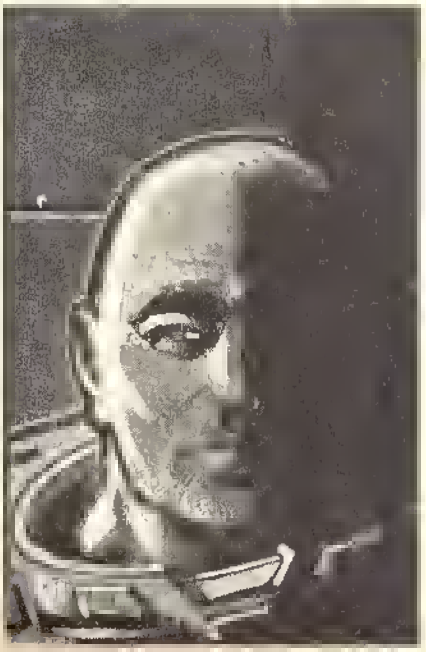


What have I done that I should finish in a filthy spacesuit on a lost rock—and not gloriously like they said in the papers back home, but starving or bleeding to death alone with a crazy robot? Why me? Why me? Why alone?

He knew there could be no answers. He expected no answers.

He was not disappointed.

He awoke. He instinctively looked at the chronometer. Its shattered face looked back at him, forcing his eyes open in after-sleep terror. The robot hummed and emitted a spark.

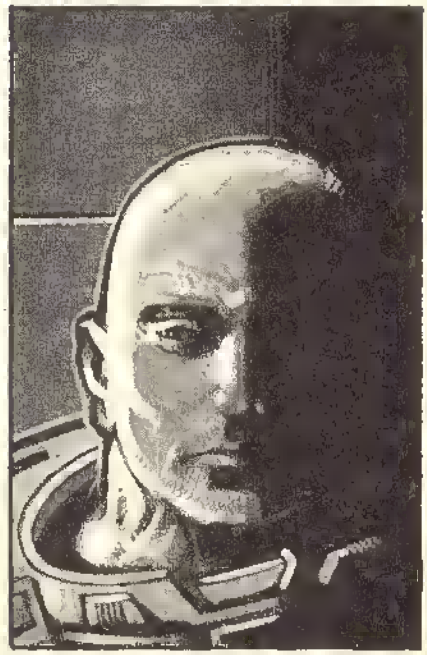


He kept his eyes open. The humming ceased. His eyes began to burn. He knew he couldn't keep them open too long.

The burning worked its way to the front of his eyes, from the top and bottom, bringing with it tears. It felt as though someone was shoving needles into the corners. The tears ran down over his cheeks.

His eyes snapped shut. The roaring grew in his ears. The robot didn't make a sound.

Could it be inoperative? Could it have worn down to

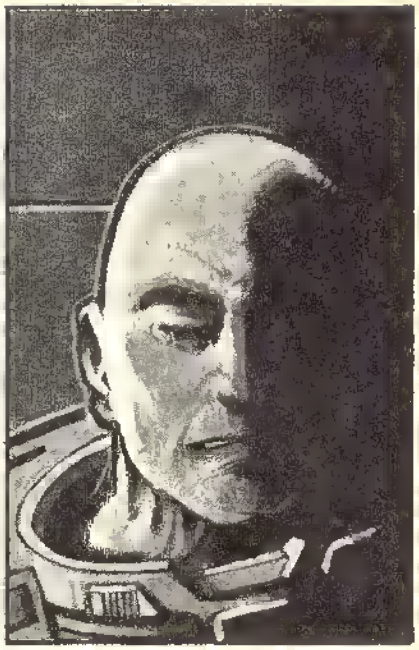


immobility? Could he take the chance of experimenting?

He slid down to a more comfortable position. The robot charged forward the instant he moved. He froze in mid-movement, his heart a chunk of ice. The robot stopped, confused, a scant ten inches from his outstretched foot. The machine hummed to itself, the noise of it coming both from the machine before him and from somewhere behind the wall.

He was suddenly alert.

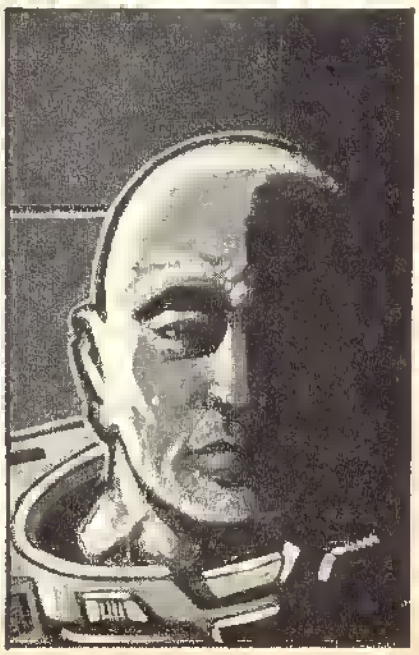
If it had been working correctly, there would have been



little or no sound from the appendage, and none whatsoever from the brain. But it was *not* working properly, and the sound of its thinking was distinct.

The robot rolled backward, its "eyes" still toward Terrence. The sense orbs of the machine were in the torso, giving the machine the look of a squat metal gargoyle, squared and deadly.

The humming was growing louder, every now and then a sharp *pffffft*! of sparks mixed with it. Terrence had a moment's horror at the thought

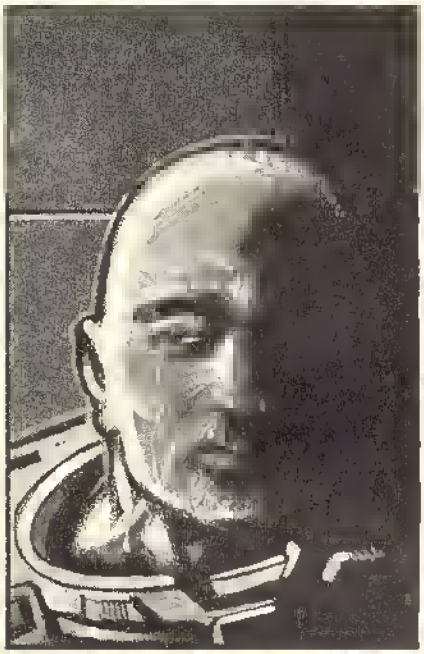


of a short-circuit, a fire in the life hutch, and no service robot to put it out.

He listened carefully to pinpoint the location of the robot's brain built into the wall.

Then he thought he had it. Or was it there? It was either in the wall behind a bulkhead next to the refrigerator, or behind a bulkhead near the relay machines. The two possible housings were within a few feet of each other, but they might make a great deal of difference.

The distortion created by the steel plate in front of the brain,



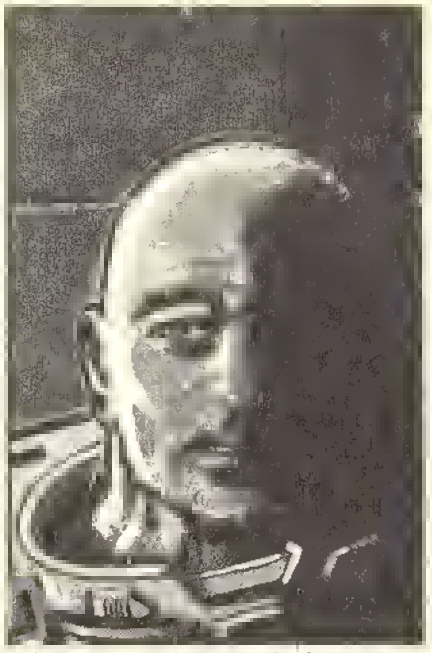
and the distracting background noise of the robot broadcasting it made it difficult to tell exactly which was the correct location.

He drew a deep breath.

The ribs slid a fraction of an inch together, their broken ends grinding.

He moaned.

A high-pitched tortured moan that died quickly, but throbbed back and forth inside his head, echoing and building itself into a paean of sheer agony! It forced his tongue out of his mouth, limp in a corner

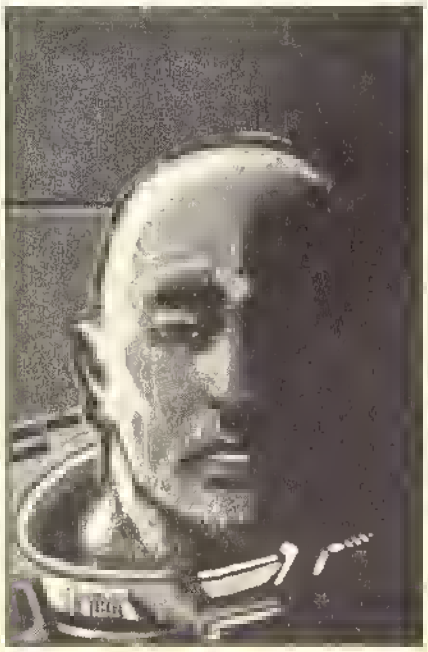


of his lips, moving slightly. The robot rolled forward. He drew his tongue in, clamped his mouth shut, cut off the scream inside his head at its high point!

The robot stopped, rolled back to its duty-niche.

Oh God! The pain! The God God where are you pain!

Beads of sweat hroke out on his body. He could feel their tickle inside his spacesuit, inside his jumper, inside the hodyshirt, on his skin. The pain of the ribs was suddenly heightened by an irresistible itching of his skin.



He moved infinitesimally within the suit, his outer appearance giving no indication of the movement. The itching did not subside. The more he tried to make it stop, the more he thought about not thinking about it, the worse it became. His armpits, the crooks of his arms, his thighs where the tight service-pants clung—suddenly too tightly—were madness. He had to scratch!

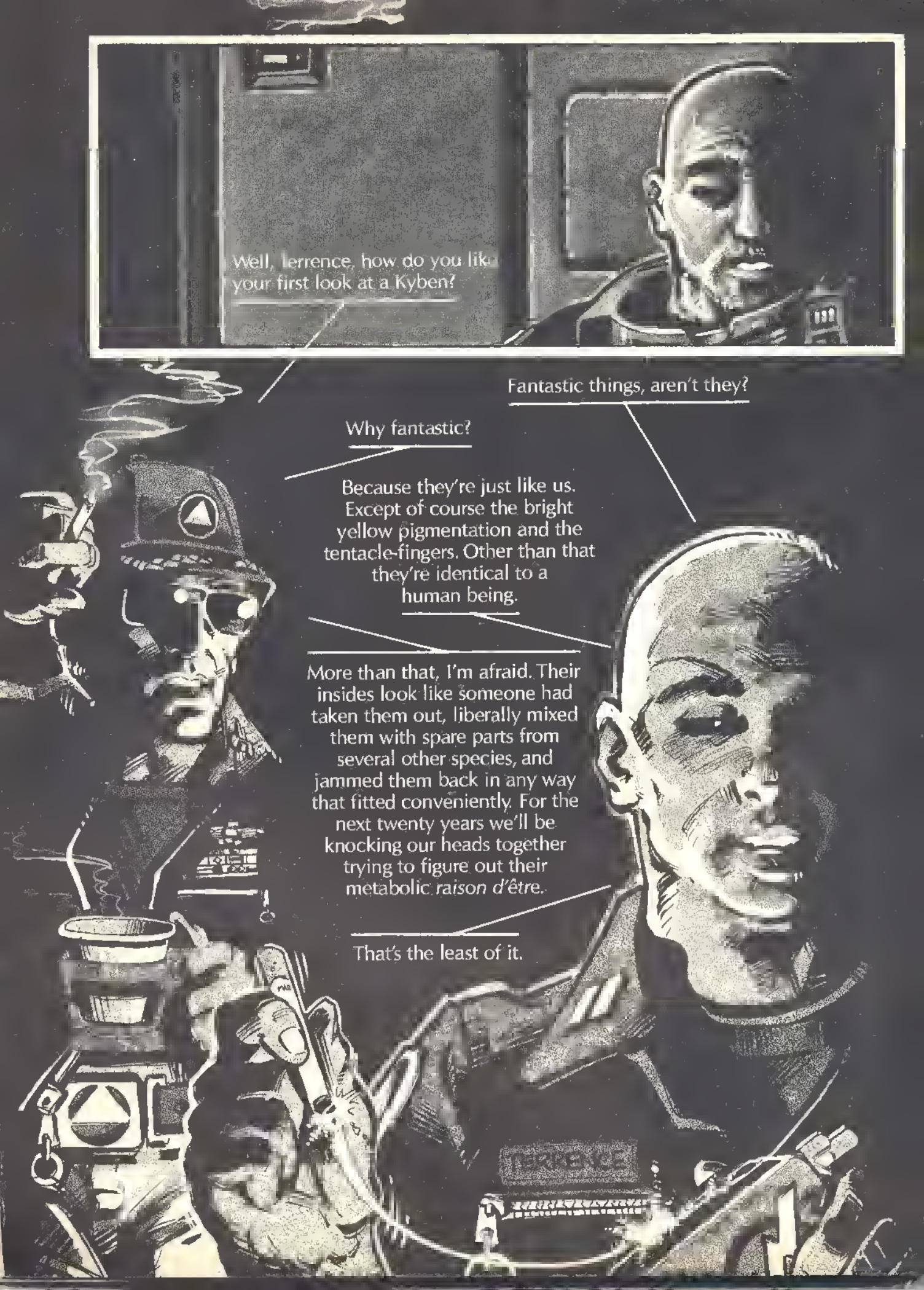
He almost started to make the movement. He stopped before he started. A laugh bubbled into his head. *God Al-*

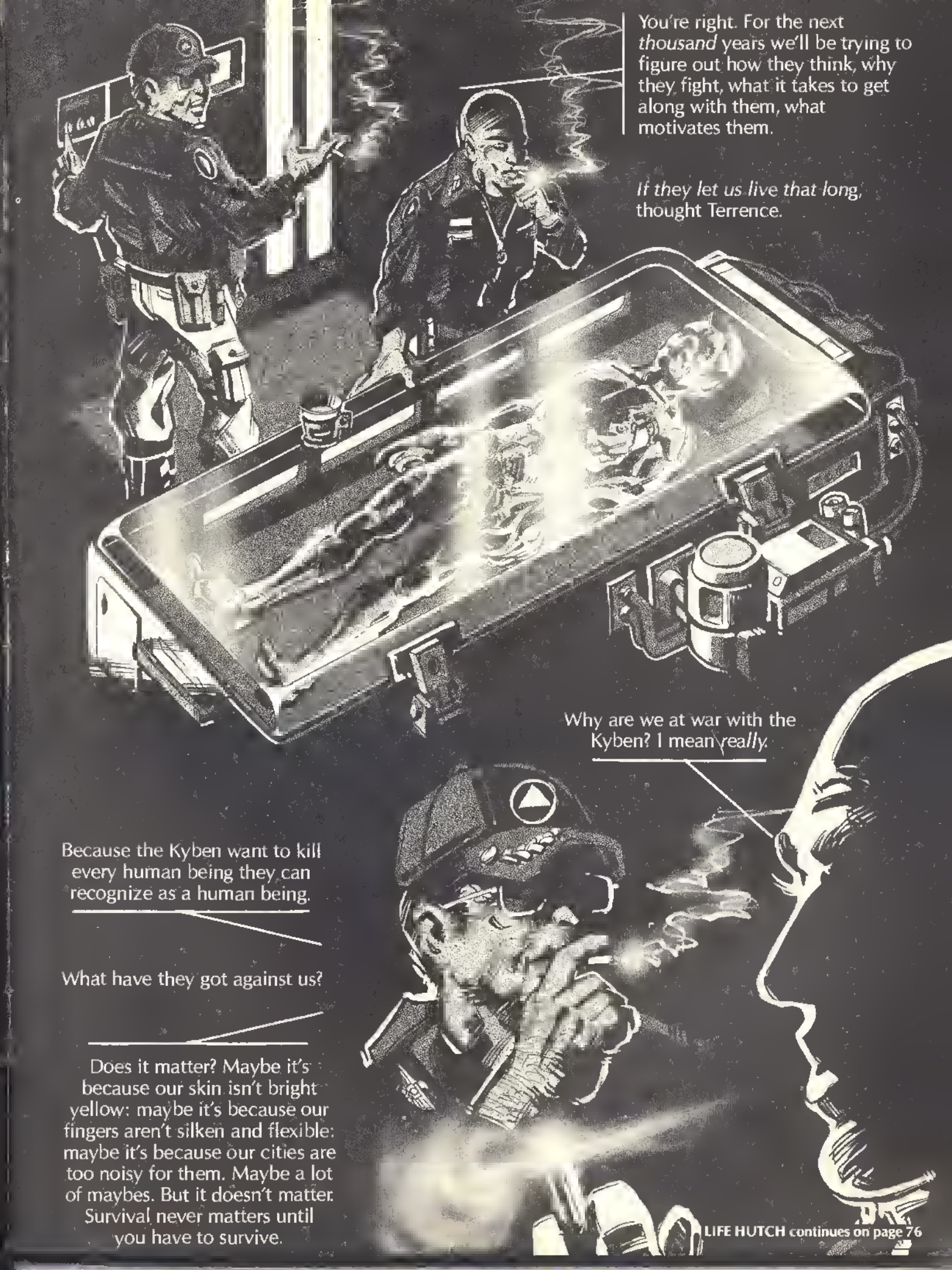
mighty, and I always laughed at the slobs who suffered with the seven-year itch, the ones who always did a little dance when they were at attention during inspection, the ones who could scratch and sigh contentedly. God, how I envy them. His thoughts were taking on a wild sound, even to him.

The prickling did not stop. He twisted faintly. It got worse. He took another deep breath.

The ribs sandpapered again.

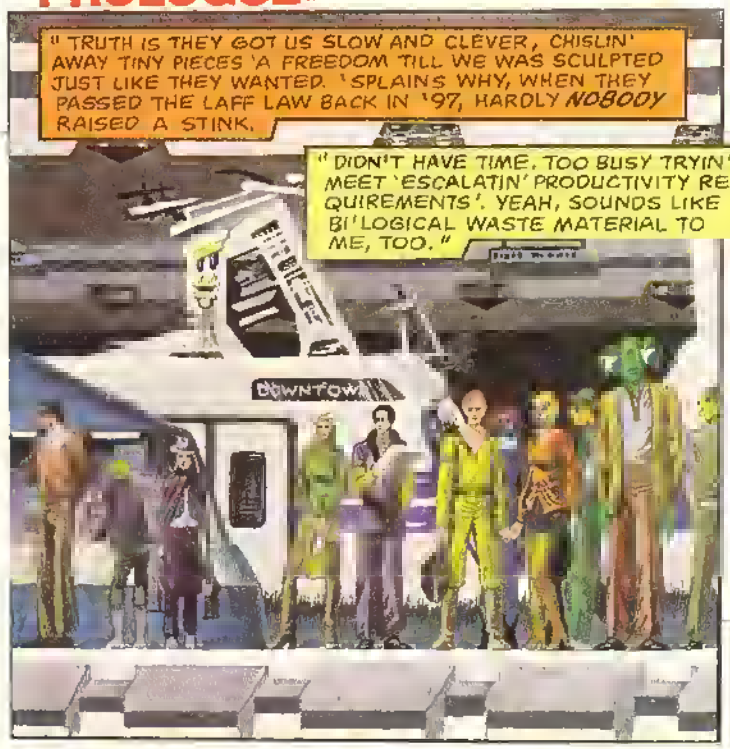
This time, blessedly, he fainted from the pain.


Well, Terrence, how do you like your first look at a Kyben?
Fantastic things, aren't they?
Why fantastic?
Because they're just like us. Except of course the bright yellow pigmentation and the tentacle-fingers. Other than that they're identical to a human being.
More than that, I'm afraid. Their insides look like someone had taken them out, liberally mixed them with spare parts from several other species, and jammed them back in any way that fitted conveniently. For the next twenty years we'll be knocking our heads together trying to figure out their metabolic *raison d'être*.
That's the least of it.



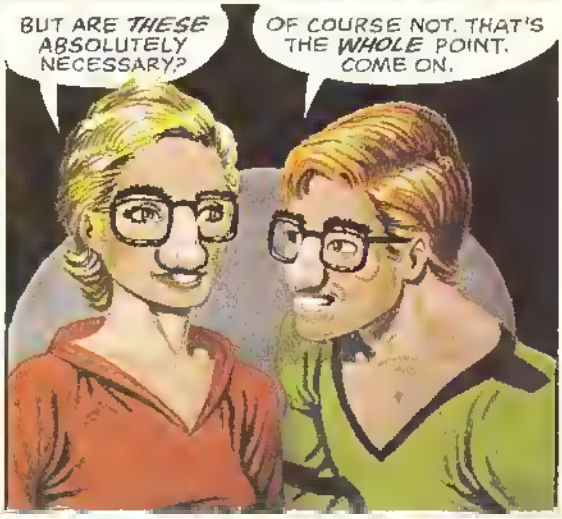
LIFE HUTCH continues on page 76

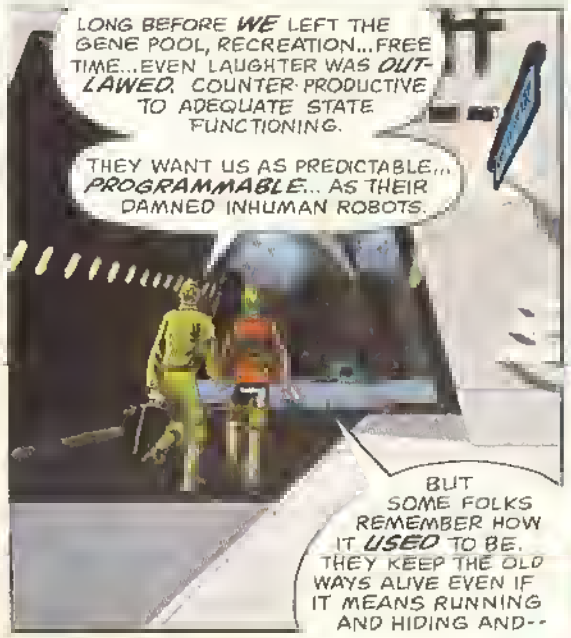
PROLOGUE:


" TRUTH IS THEY GOT US SLOW AND CLEVER, CHISLIN' AWAY TINY PIECES 'A FREEDOM TILL WE WAS SCULPTED JUST LIKE THEY WANTED. 'SPLAINS WHY, WHEN THEY PASSED THE LAFF LAW BACK IN '97, HARDLY NOBODY RAISED A STINK.
" DIDN'T HAVE TIME. TOO BUSY TRYIN' TO MEET 'ESCALATIN' PRODUCTIVITY REQUIREMENTS'. YEAH, SOUNDS LIKE BI'LOGICAL WASTE MATERIAL TO ME, TOO."
DOWNTOWN

" WAY I FIGGER IT, THE JOKE'S ON US. TROUBLE IS, WE AIN'T LAFFIN' MUCH NO MORE... "
COMPTROLLER-- SECTOR FOUR, GRID DELTA.
TRAFFIC FLOW PATTERN VECTORED. OVERRIDE TRANSIT CAPABILITY MINUS POINT OH-TWO.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS HELEN, NOT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.
I DO, NEL. REALLY.


BUT ARE THESE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY?
OF COURSE NOT. THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT. COME ON.


LONG BEFORE WE LEFT THE GENE POOL, RECREATION...FREE TIME...EVEN LAUGHTER WAS OUTLAWED, COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE TO ADEQUATE STATE FUNCTIONING.
THEY WANT US AS PREDICTABLE... PROGRAMMABLE... AS THEIR DAMNED INHUMAN ROBOTS.
BUT SOME FOLKS REMEMBER HOW IT USED TO BE. THEY KEEP THE OLD WAYS ALIVE EVEN IF IT MEANS RUNNING AND HIDING AND--

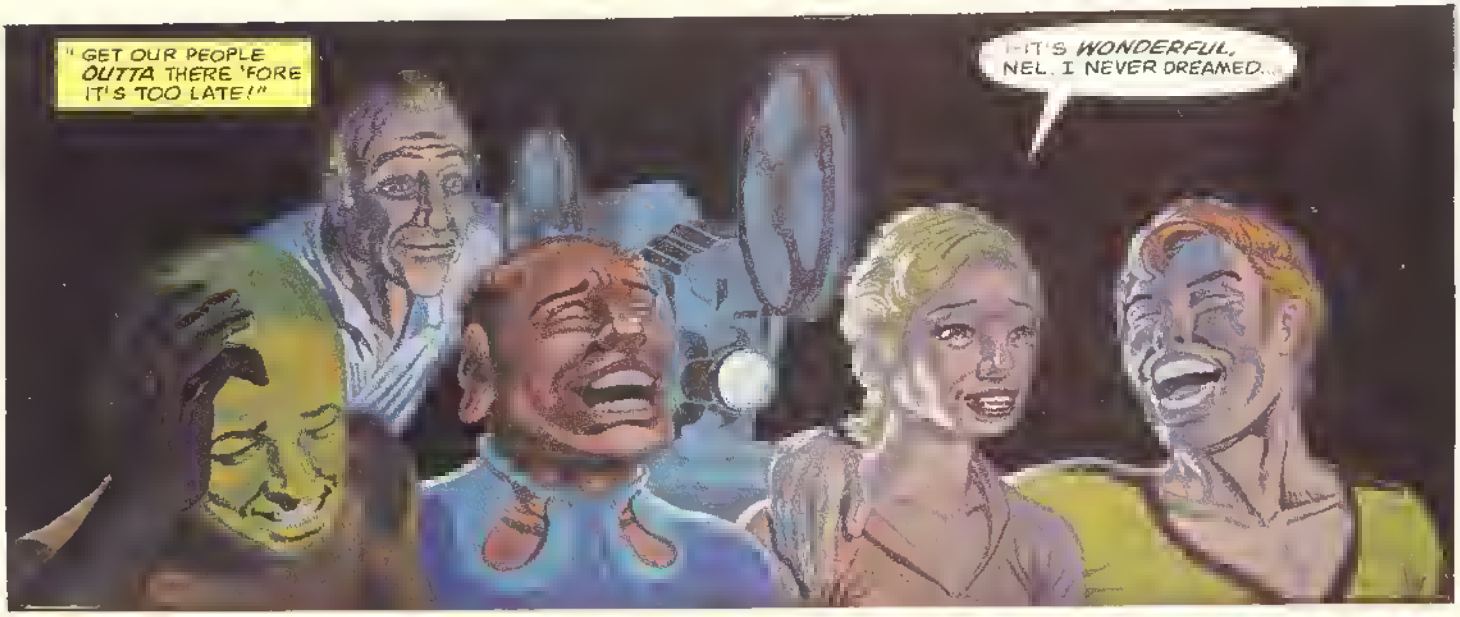
POSSIBLE LAFFERS ON TRACK THREE.
WE'LL NEED A RIOT SQUAD...

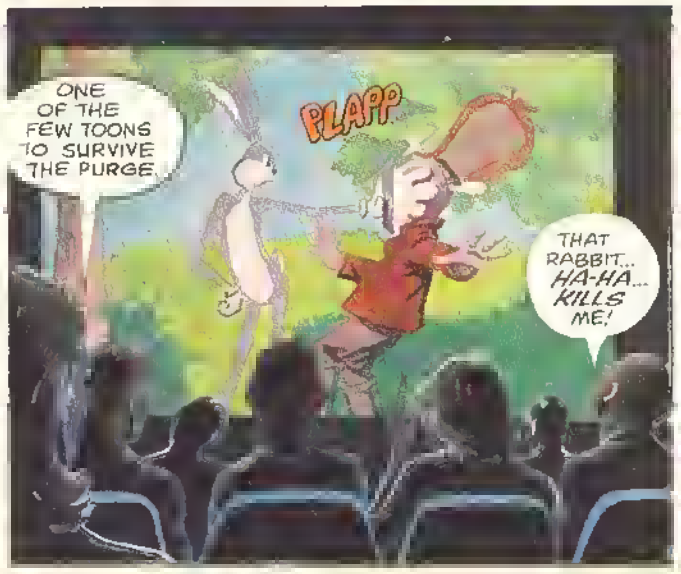
" FELDMAN'S *DEAD* AS VAUDEVILLE. SO'RE MARTIN AND BROOKS AND EVEN LETTERMAN. RICKLES WAS FOUND GUILTY 'A *SEDITION* IN THE GREAT PURGE 'A '98. THEY SURGIC'LY *REMOVED* HIS VOCAL CORDS.

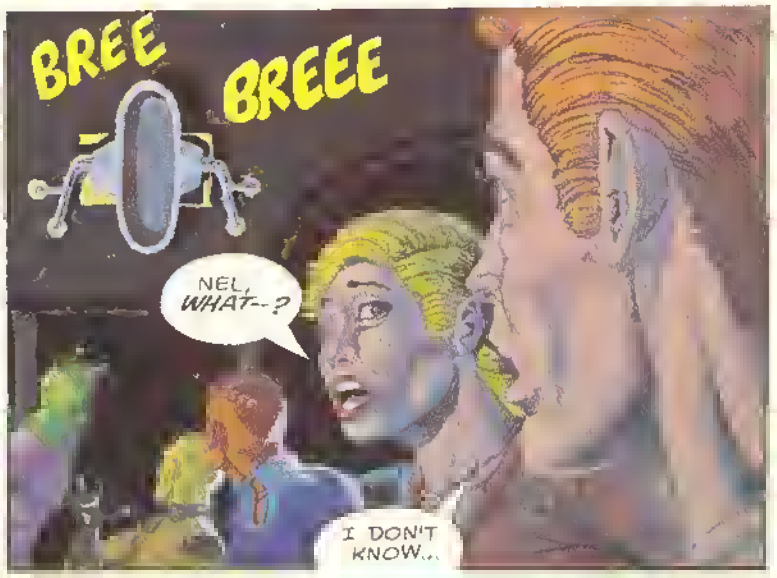
" CARSON'S ONLY A MEM'RY NOW BUT RUMOR HAS IT A *LITTLE* CLONE STILL DOES AN OCCASIONAL IMPERSONATION.

" BUT IT JUST AIN'T THE *SAME*. SOMEWHERE 'LONG THE LINE THINGS WENT SOUR AND FOLKS TURNED BITTER AND LIFE BECAME--

NO LAFFIN' MATTER

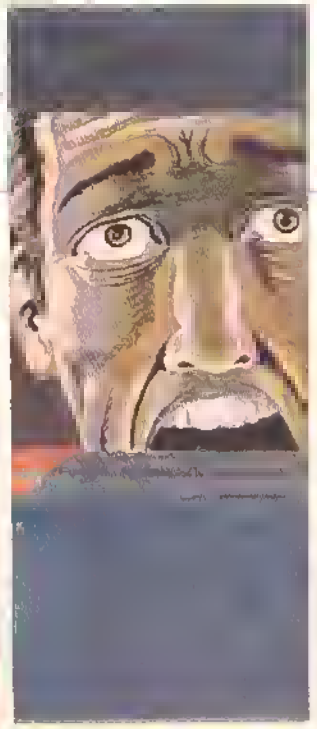

" GET OUR PEOPLE OUTTA THERE 'FORE IT'S TOO LATE!"
IT'S WONDERFUL, NEL. I NEVER DREAMED...

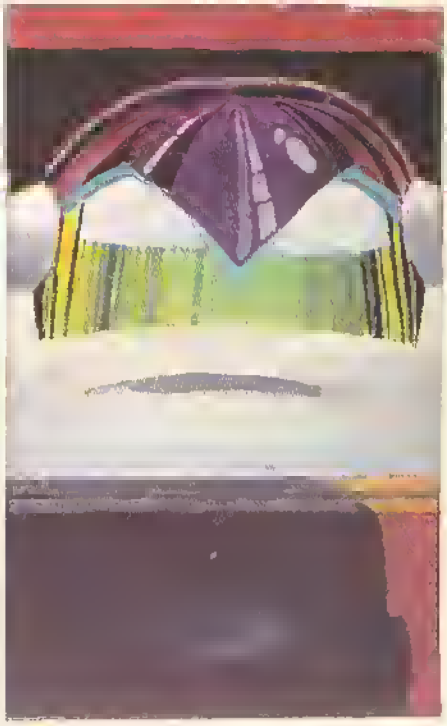

ONE OF THE FEW TOONS TO SURVIVE THE PURGE.
PLAPP
THAT RABBIT... HA-HA... KILLS ME!


BREE
BREEE
NEL, WHAT--?
I DON'T KNOW...

NO NEED TO WORRY. JUST THE STRAGGLER ALARM.
'SIDES, ROBBIE'S THE BEST SPOTTER WE GOT. IF SOME-THIN' WAS WRONG, HE'D LET US KNOW.

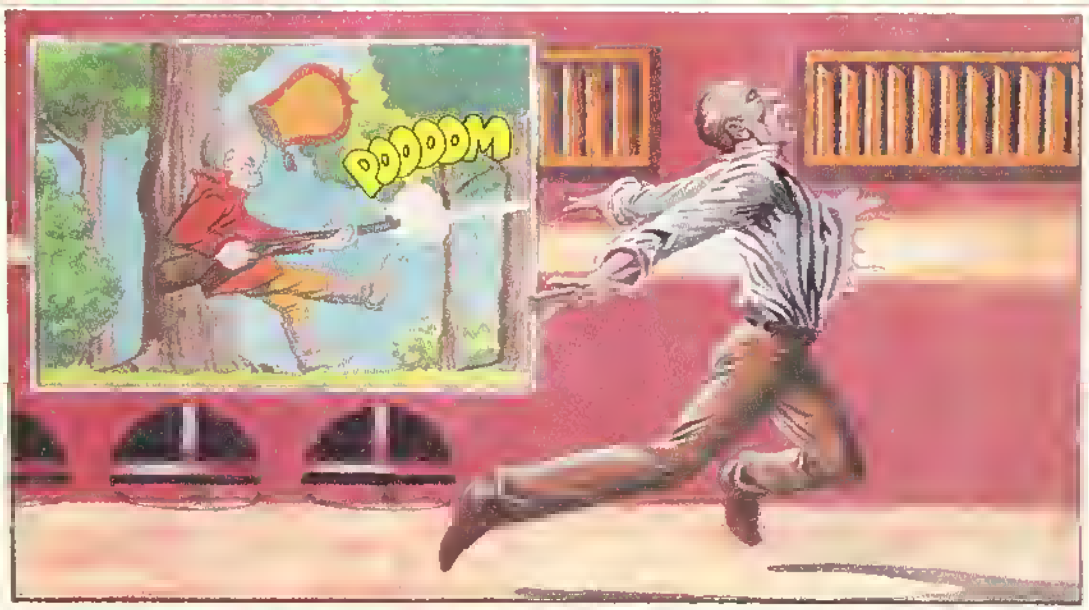
YOU'RE LATE, BROTHER, WE--





GOT YOU THIS TIME, YOU WASCAWWY WABBIT!
STOP, LAWBREAKER!

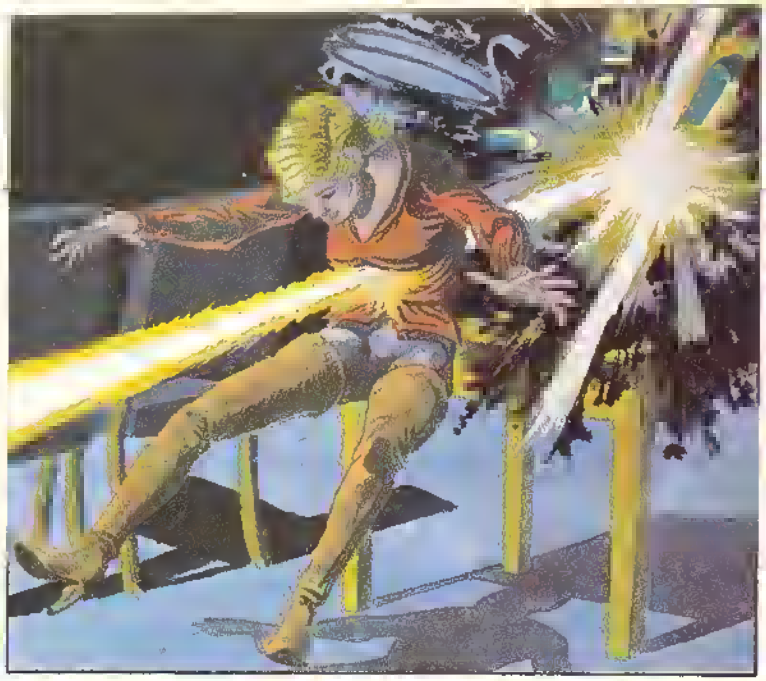
IN THE NAME 'A GOD, COSTELLO! RUN!


DOOOOM

I TRIED TO WARN YOU, OLD FRIEND... I...

HECKLERS!
NOT THEM! NOT HERE!

NEL...
...HELP ME... PLEASE!
NEL--



YOU... KILLED HER... FOR NOTHING--!

DAMN YOU, HECKLER! DAMN YOU TO HELL!
YOU HAD NO RIGHT!

I HAVE EVERY RIGHT.

THE LAW IS THE LAW.
THE LAW MUST BE UPHELD.
FRI 10

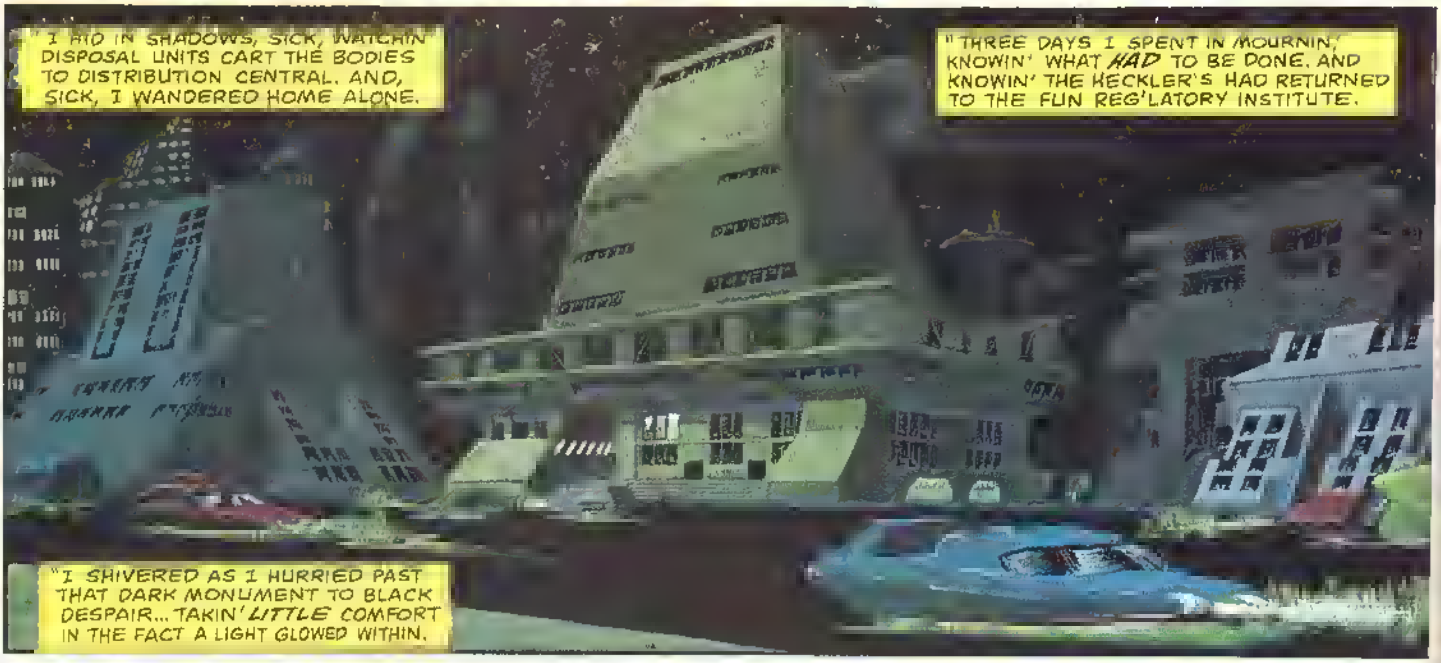
THE LAW WILL BE UPHELD

KRAKK
FRI 10

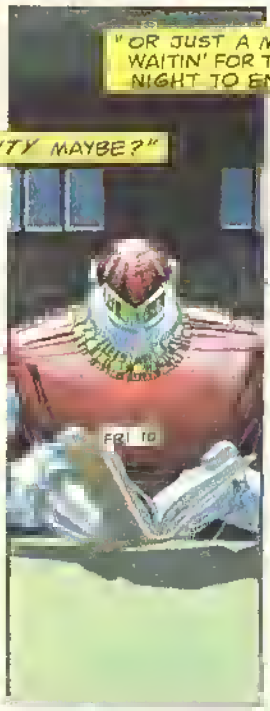
THAT, TOO, IS THE LAW.
FRI 10

IS LAUGHTER SO IMPORTANT... TO BE WORTH YOUR LIFE?

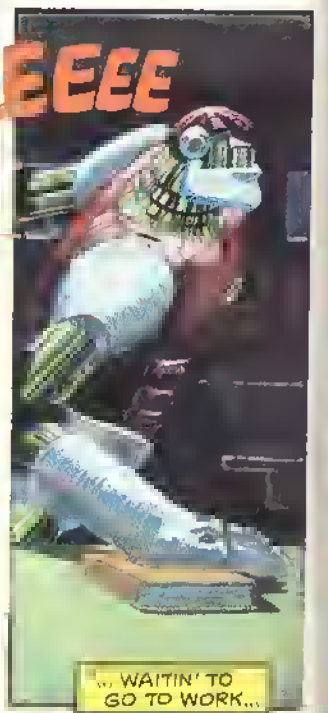
1001 JOKES FOR EVERY OCCASION

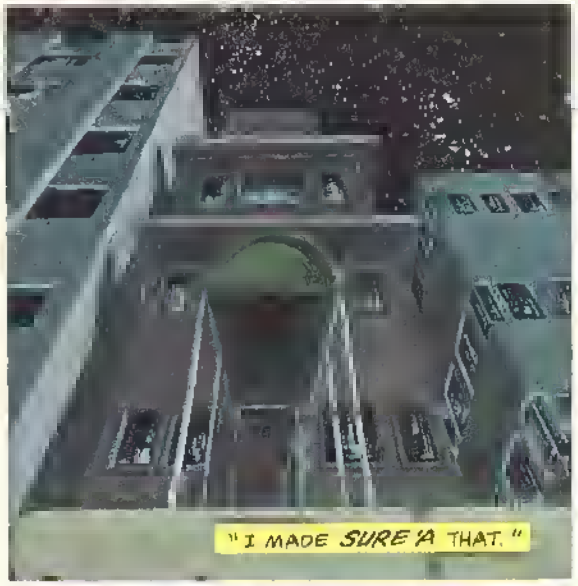

"I HID IN SHADOWS, SICK, WATCHIN' DISPOSAL UNITS CART THE BODIES TO DISTRIBUTION CENTRAL. AND, SICK, I WANDERED HOME ALONE.
"THREE DAYS I SPENT IN MOURNIN', KNOWIN' WHAT HAD TO BE DONE. AND KNOWIN' THE HECKLER'S HAD RETURNED TO THE FUN REG'LATORY INSTITUTE.
"I SHIVERED AS I HURRIED PAST THAT DARK MONUMENT TO BLACK DESPAIR... TAKIN' LITTLE COMFORT IN THE FACT A LIGHT GLOWED WITHIN.

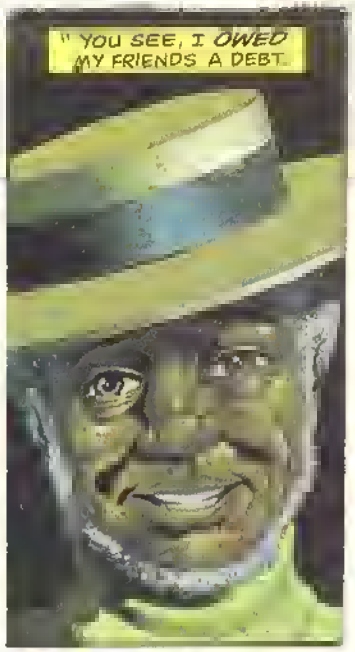
"A SPARK'A HUMANITY MAYBE?"

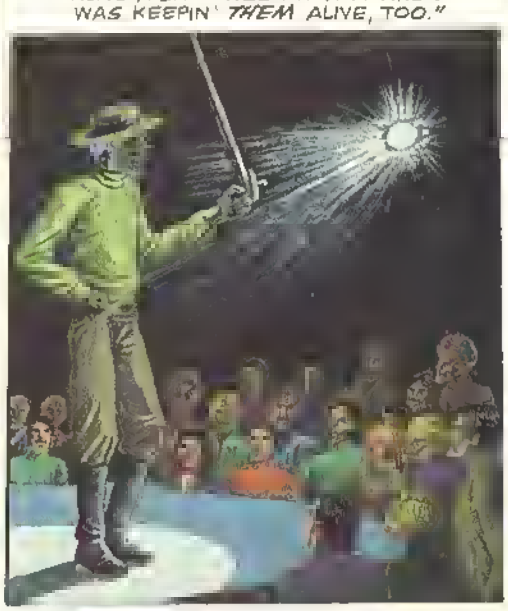

"OR JUST A MONSTER WAITIN' FOR THE LONG NIGHT TO END...
FRI 10

RREEEEEE
FRI 10

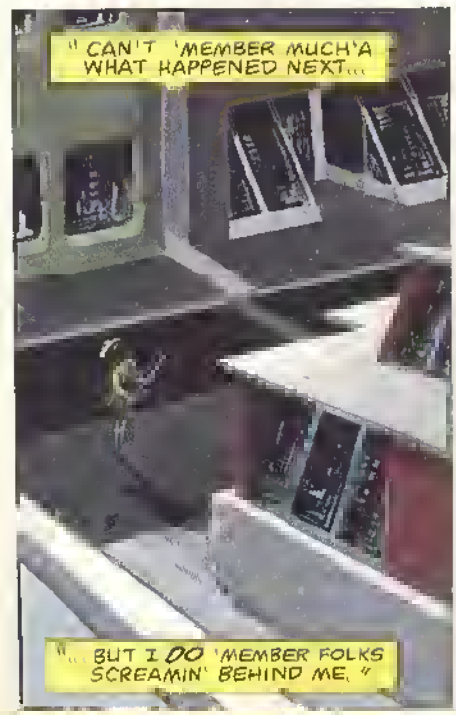

... WAITIN' TO GO TO WORK...


"I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHIN.' THERE WAS MORE LIFE IN YOUNGMAN'S DECREPIT OL' FUNERAL HOME THAN THAT GODFORSAKEN INSTITUTE."
"I MADE SURE'A THAT."


"YOU SEE, I OWED MY FRIENDS A DEBT.


"AND IF I COULD KEEP THE LAUGHTER ALIVE A BIT LONGER IT WAS LIKE I WAS KEEPIN' THEM ALIVE, TOO."

SO I CAME OUTTA RETIRE MENT...
"...AND STEPPED SMACK DAB INTO HELL..."


"CAN'T 'MEMBER MUCH'A WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...
"...BUT I DO 'MEMBER FOLKS SCREAMIN' BEHIND ME."

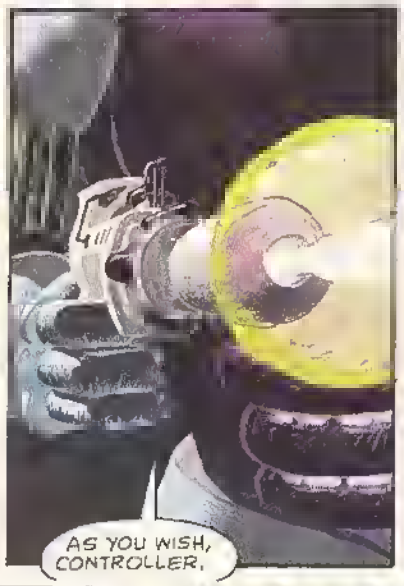
"THEN MY WHOLE WORLD CAME TO A STOP..."
END OF THE LINE, LAFFER.

THERE'S NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN.

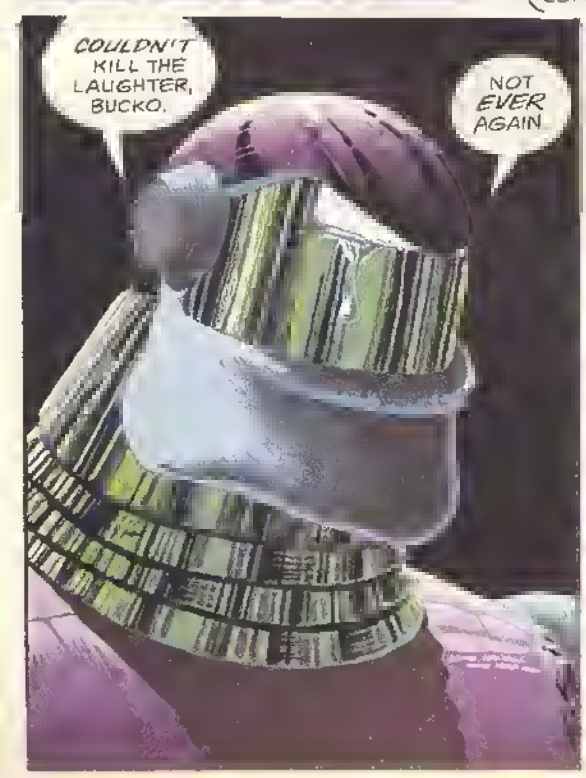
MAYBE THERE NEVER WAS.
A MAN GETS TIRED 'A RUN-NIN'. TIRED 'A BEIN' TOLD WHAT TO DO AND WHEN.

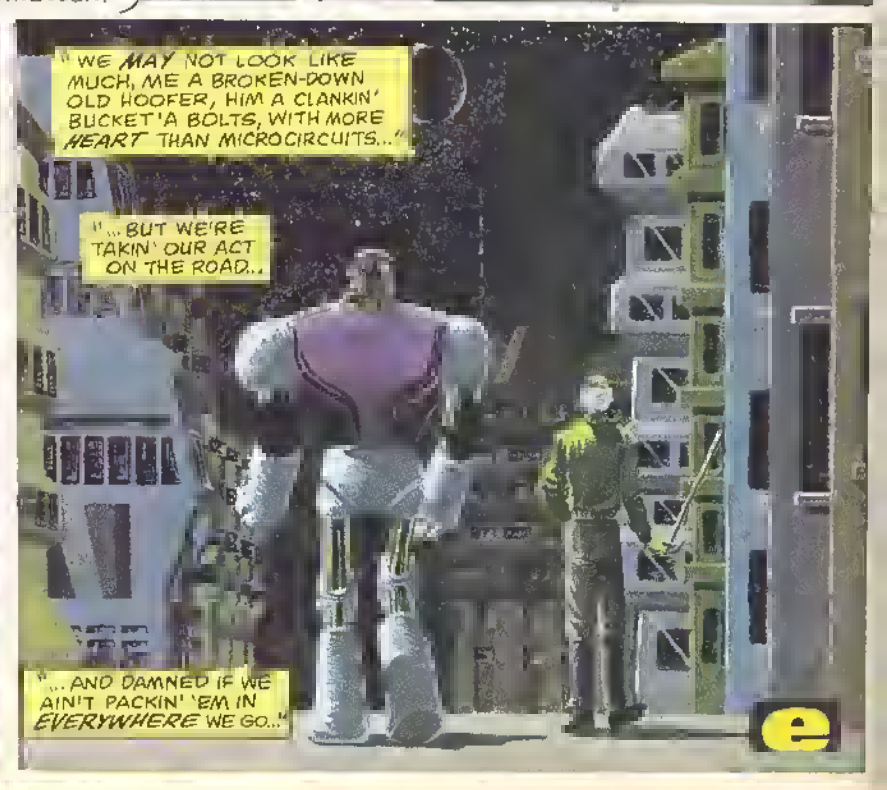
A MAN NEEDS TO BE FREE. IF HE AIN'T THAT HE'S NOTHIN' BUT A MACHINE.
SO DO YOUR WORST, BUCKO. YOU'LL ONLY BE DOIN' ME A FAVOR.

THE LAW MUST BE MAINTAINED. FRI-IO, EXECUTE THE LAW.


AS YOU WISH, CONTROLLER.

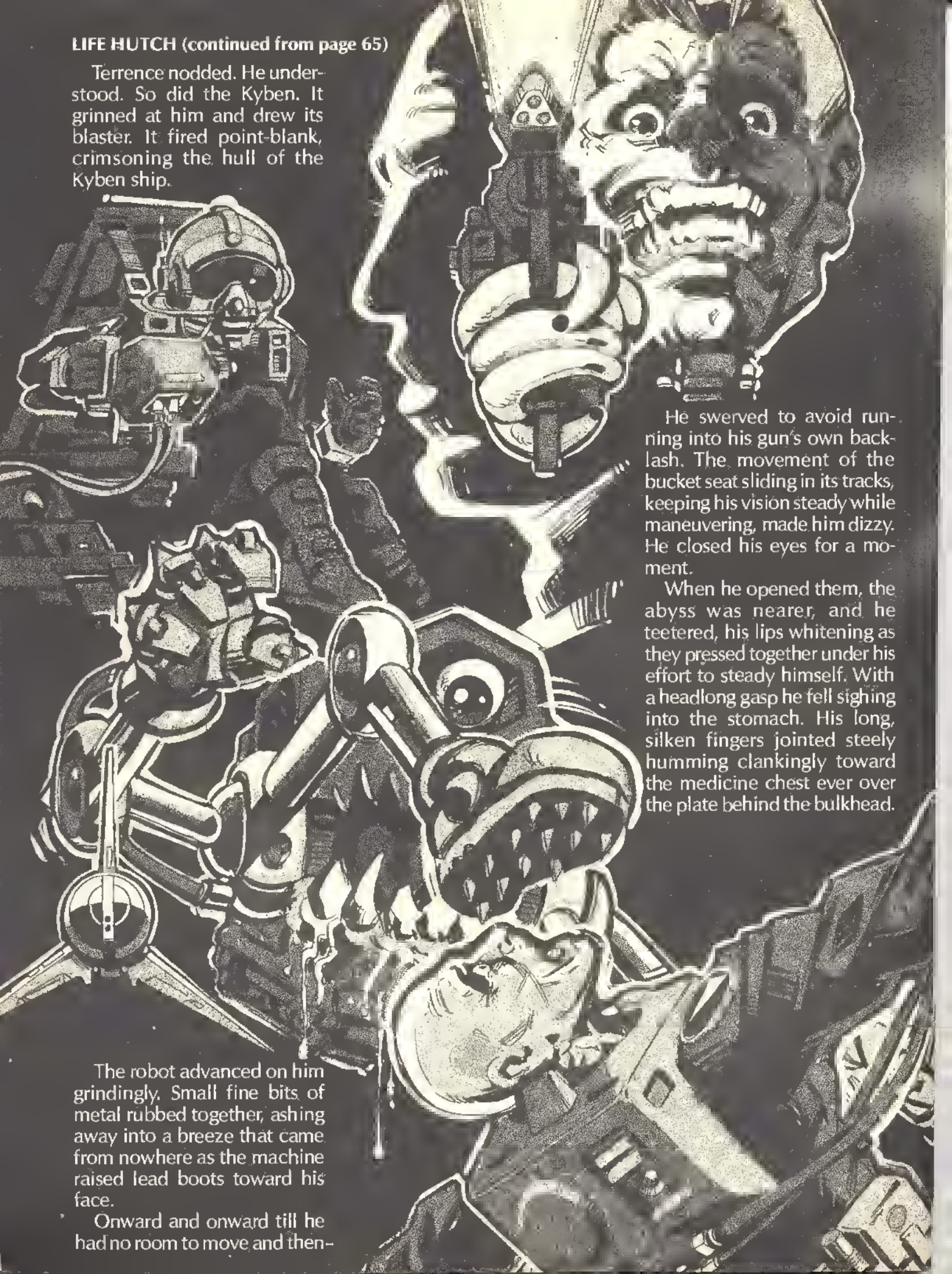
Y-YOU SHOT 'IM--!
BUT--


COULDN'T KILL THE LAUGHTER, BUCKO.
NOT EVER AGAIN.


"WE MAY NOT LOOK LIKE MUCH, ME A BROKEN-DOWN OLD HOOFER, HIM A CLANKIN' BUCKET 'A BOLTS, WITH MORE HEART THAN MICROCIRCUITS..."
"...BUT WE'RE TAKIN' OUR ACT ON THE ROAD...
"...AND DAMNED IF WE AIN'T PACKIN' 'EM IN EVERYWHERE WE GO..."

LIFE HUTCH (continued from page 65)

Terrence nodded. He understood. So did the Kyben. It grinned at him and drew its blaster. It fired point-blank, crimsoning the hull of the Kyben ship.



He swerved to avoid running into his gun's own backlash. The movement of the bucket seat sliding in its tracks, keeping his vision steady while maneuvering, made him dizzy. He closed his eyes for a moment.

When he opened them, the abyss was nearer, and he teetered, his lips whitening as they pressed together under his effort to steady himself. With a headlong gasp he fell sighing into the stomach. His long, silken fingers jointed steely humming clankingly toward the medicine chest ever over the plate behind the bulkhead.

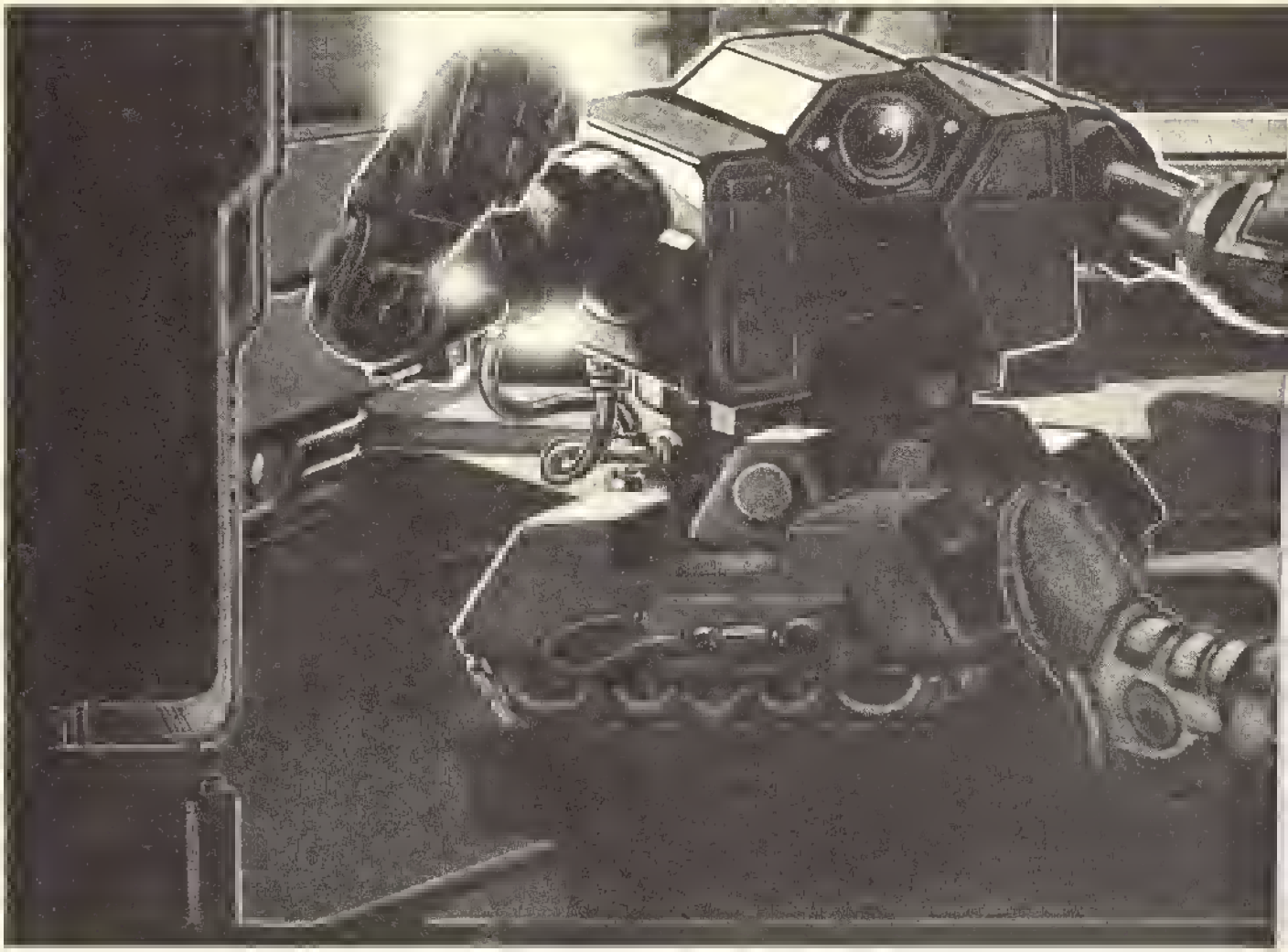
The robot advanced on him grindingly. Small fine bits of metal rubbed together, ashing away into a breeze that came from nowhere as the machine raised lead boots toward his face.

Onward and onward till he had no room to move and then–

The light came on, bright, brighter than any star Terrence had ever seen, glowing, broiling, flickering, shining, bobbing a ball of light on the chest of the robot, who staggered, stumbled, stepped.

The robot hissed, hummed and exploded into a million flying, racing fragments, shooting beams of light all over the abyss over which Terrence again teetered, teetering. He flailed his arms wildly trying to escape but at last moment, before the fall

He awoke with a start!



He saved himself only by his unconscious. Even in the hell of a nightmare he was aware of the situation. He had not moaned and writhed in his delirium. He had kept motionless and silent.

He knew it was true, because he was still alive.

Only his surprised jerking, as he came back to consciousness, started the monster rolling from its niche. He came fully awake and sat silent, slumped against the wall. The robot retreated.

Thin breath came through his nostrils. Another moment and he would have put an end to the past three days—three days or more now? how long had he been asleep?—days of torture.

He was hungry. Lord how hungry he was. The pain in his side was worse now, a steady throbbing that made even shallow breathing tortuous. He itched maddeningly. He was uncomfortably slouched against a cold steel bulkhead, every rivet having made a burrow for itself in his skin. He wished he was dead.

He didn't wish he was dead. It was all too easy to get his wish.

If he could only disable that robot brain. A total impossibility. If he could only wear Phobos and Deimos for watchfobs. If he could only shack-up with a silicon-deb from Penares. If he could only use his large colon for a lasso.

It would take a thorough destruction of the brain to do it enough damage to stop the appendage before it could roll over and smash Terrence again.

With a steel bulkhead between him and the brain, his chances of success totaled minus zero every time.

He considered which part of his body the robot would smash first. One blow of that tool-hand would kill him if it was used a second time. With the state of his present wounds, even a strong breath might finish him.

Perhaps he could make a break and get through the lock into the decompression chamber...

Worthless. (A) The robot would catch him before he had gotten to his feet, in his present condition. (B) Even allowing a miracle, even if he did get through the lock, the robot would smash the lock apart, letting in air, ruining the mechanism. (C) Even allowing a double miracle and it didn't, what the hell good would it do him? His helmet and gloves

were in the hutch itself, and there was no place to go on the planetoid. The ship was ruined, so no signal could be sent from there.

Doom suddenly compounded itself.

The more he thought about it, the more certain he was that soon the light would flicker out for him.

The light would flicker out.

The light would flicker...

The light...

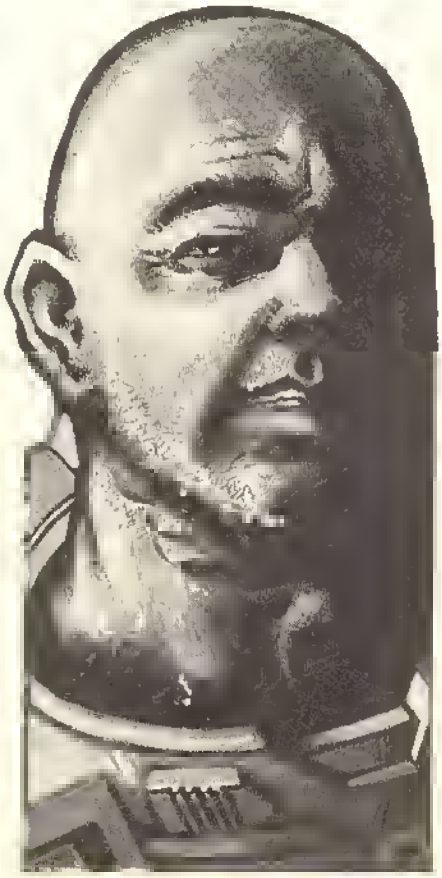
...light...?

Oh God, is it possible? Can it be? Have I found an answer? He marveled at the simplicity of it. It had been there for more than three days waiting for him to use it. It was *so* simple it was magnificent. He could hardly restrain himself from moving, just out of sheer joy.

I'm not brilliant, I'm not a genius, why did this occur to me? For a few minutes the brilliance of the solution staggered him. Would a less intelligent man have solved the problem this easily? Would a *more* intelligent man have done it? Then he remembered the dream. The light in the dream. *He* hadn't solved the problem, his unconscious had. The answer had been there all the time, but he was too close to see it. His mind had been forced to devise a way to tell him. Luckily, it had.

And finally, he didn't care *how* he had uncovered it. His God, if he had had anything to do with it, had heard him. Terrence was by no means a religious man, but this was miracle enough to make him a believer. It wasn't over yet, but the answer was there—and it *was* an answer.

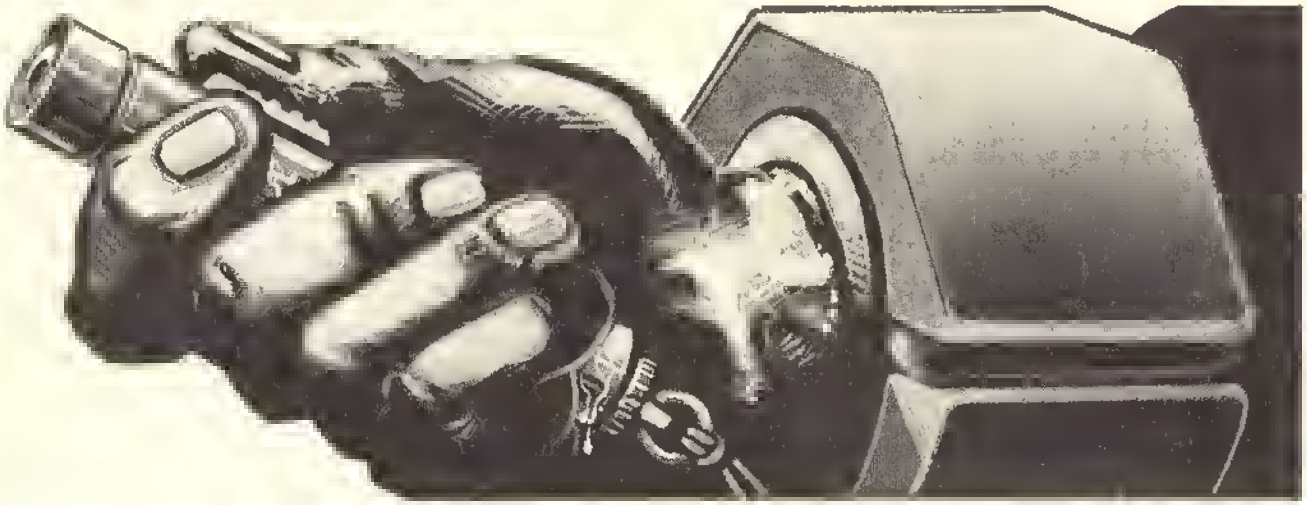
He began to save himself.



Slowly, achingly slowly, he moved his right hand, the hand away from the robot's sight, to his belt. On the belt hung the assorted implements a spaceman needs at any moment in his ship. A wrench. A packet of sleep-stavers. A compass. A geiger counter. A flashlight.

The last was the miracle. Miracle in a tube.

He fingered it almost reverently, then unclipped it in a moment's frenzy, still immobile to the robot's "eyes."



He held it at his side, away from his body by a fraction of an inch, pointing up over the bulge of his spacesuited leg.

If the robot looked at him, all it would see would be the motionless bulk of his leg, blocking off any movement on his part. To the machine, he was inert. Motionless.

Now he thought wildly, *where is the brain?*

If it is behind the relay machines, I'm still dead. If it is near the refrigerator, I'm saved. He could afford to take no chances. He would have to move.

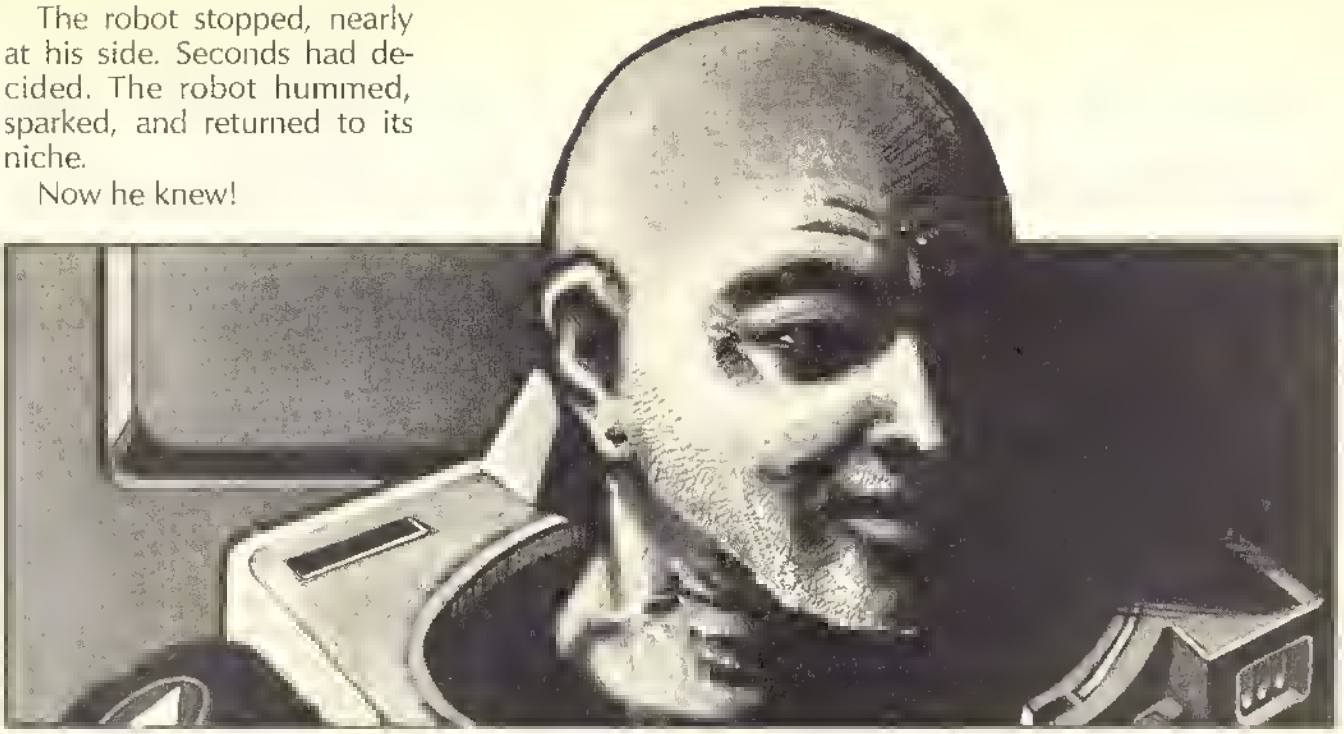
He lifted one leg.

The robot moved toward him. The humming and sparking were more distinct this time. He dropped the leg.

Behind the plates above the refrigerator!

The robot stopped, nearly at his side. Seconds had decided. The robot hummed, sparked, and returned to its niche.

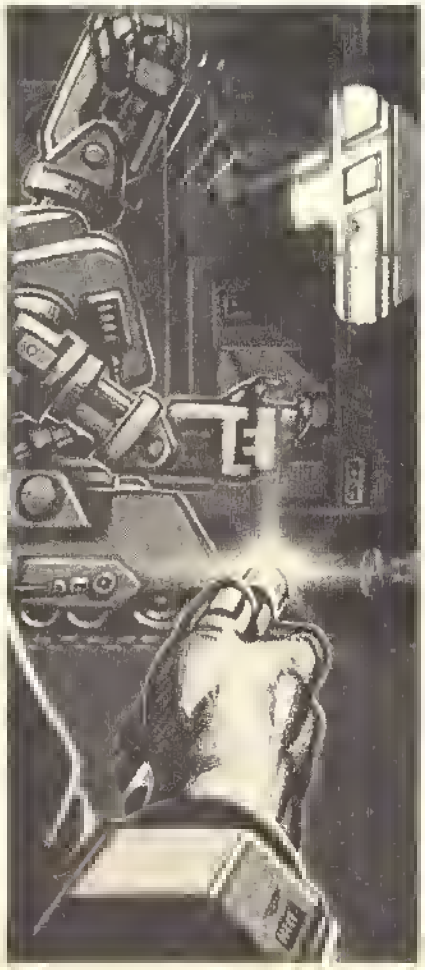
Now he knew!



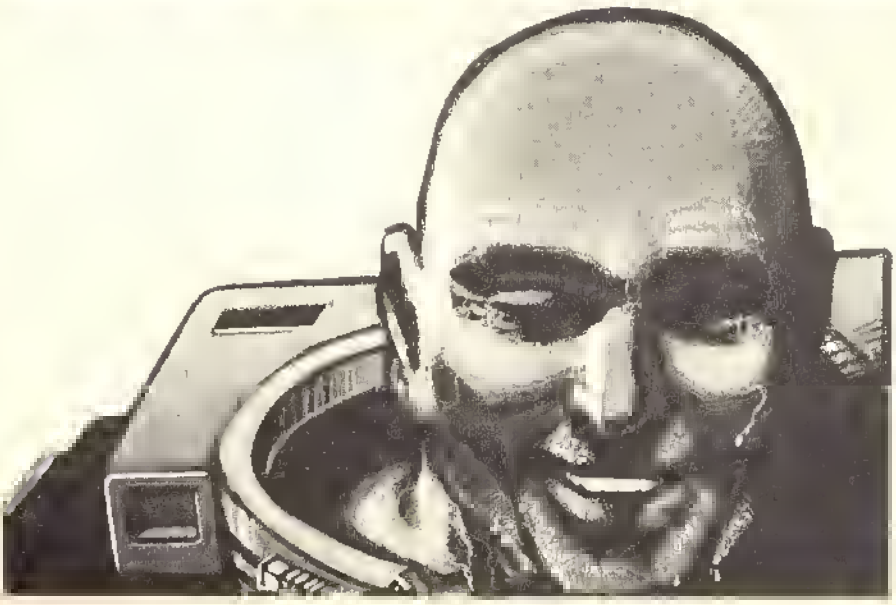
He pressed the button. The invisible beam of the flashlight leaped out, speared the bulkhead above the refrigerator. He pressed the button again and again, the flat circle of light appearing, disappearing, appearing, disappearing on the faceless metal of the life hutch's wall.

The robot sparked and rolled from its niche. It looked once at Terrence. Its rollers changed direction in an instant and the machine ground toward the refrigerator.

The steeled fist swung in a vicious arc, smashing with a deafening clang! at the spot where the light bubble flickered on and off.



It swung again and again. Again and again till the bulkhead had been gouged and crushed and opened, and the delicate coils and plates and circuits and memorex modules behind it were refuse and rubble. Until the robot froze, with arm half-ready to strike again. Dead. Immobile. Brain and appendage.



Even then Terrence did not stop pressing the flashlight button. Wildly he thumbed it again and again and again.

Then he realized it was all over.

The robot was dead. He was alive. He would be saved. He had no doubts about that. *Now* he could cry.

The medicine chest grew large through the shimmering in his eyes.

God bless you, little life hutch, he thought, before he fainted.

NEW LIFE FOR OLD MALLS

FEB. 10, HOOPERTOWN, TEXAS — Violence again erupted after sunset when angry costumed cult-film buffs attacked stragglers of a Parent Protest Group outside the KA Corporation's Hoopertown Mall Complex. Three women were hospitalized, and five teenagers arrested. It is the tenth such incident since KA opened their new 'Cinemall' one month ago today.

"We are not responsible for the imbalance of our patrons," E.J. Bondgrassé, a spokesman for the conglomerate known simply as KA, said during a Monday press conference. "If there is an audience for it, KA will market any film, regardless of its nature. KA will also continue to produce and distribute films to the Hoopertown Complex and our 665 other reconstructed malls."

The Hoopertown Complex, dormant and decaying since 1987, showed record profits from its lower level exhibitions of 'cult' films over the first 30 days of renewed operation. Upper level business started brisk but has been declining for the past two weeks. The Parent Protest Group claims that the mall has become overrun with "cult-movie freaks" who "prohibit decent families from attending the wholesome films KA offers on the upper levels."

"I'm afraid to take my children there because of all the weirdos," housewife Cory Bburn said. "We'd like to go see the Fred MacMurray Festival, but the place is too dangerous."

Continued on page 2, column one

CINEMALL LISTINGS

NOW PLAYING

CONTINUOUS FROM MIDNIGHT

Cinema sex death.
First only longshot, then an intimate act at 72 fps.
Substance discovered within chaos.
But always, only 2-D.

KULTZ
extends that.

KULTZ
pure vision.

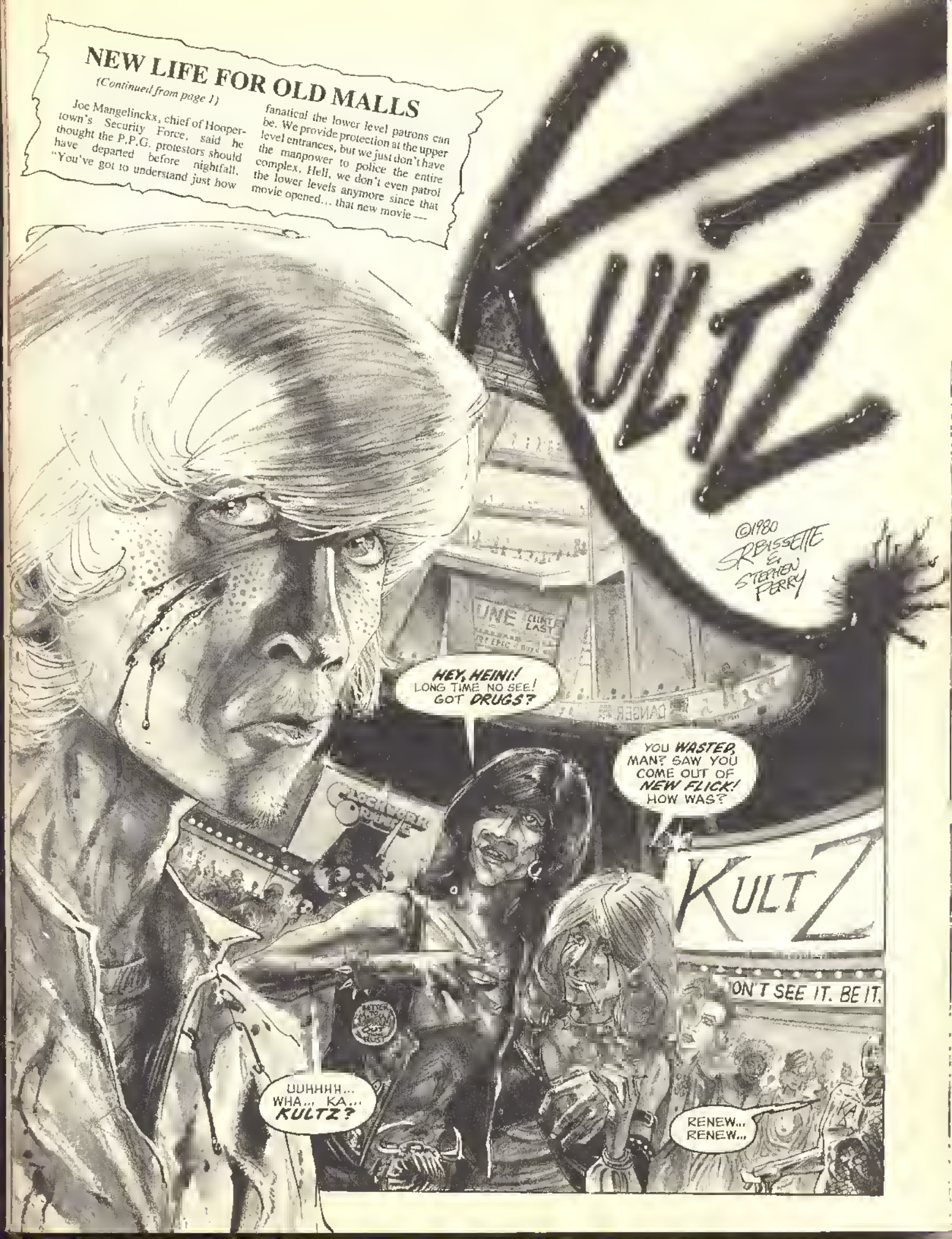
KULTZ
goes beyond.

KULTZ
Don't See It. Be It.

NEW LIFE FOR OLD MALLS

(Continued from page 1)

Joe Mangelinckx, chief of Hoopertown's Security Force, said he thought the P.P.G. protestors should have departed before nightfall. "You've got to understand just how fanatical the lower level patrons can be. We provide protection at the upper level entrances, but we just don't have the manpower to police the entire complex. Hell, we don't even patrol the lower levels anymore since that movie opened... that new movie —



CUSTODIAL CONTRACT INACTIVE... RENEW... RENEW... CONTRACT RENEWAL, BIOPLAZ 666-A.

OPTION EFFECTED.

UH?

HEY, MAN-- DRUGS!

SSSST!

YOUR TICKET... CONTRACT ACTIVATED.

...UH... YUH.

WHAT 'BOUT US, MAN?

'T SEE IT. BE IT.

CHECK ALL FIREARMS

INEFFECTIVE.

DON'T HASSLE, FRANK!

MAYBE CHROMEDOME SELL-- OOPS! WATCHIT, MAMA.

WE CAME FOR A GOOD TIME, RIGHT, HEINI?

YEAH, MAN, SIT WITH US, DO A NUMBER.

YOU TELL ME. WHAT KINDA DRUGS SILVER GUY'S GOT IN 'IM.

EXIT

SO, HEINI... YOU WASTED OR WHAT?

BIZARRE ATTACK, SUSPECT ESCAPES

HOOPERTOWN—Sixteen year old Gunnar Elface was captured today, but he escaped authorities mere minutes after his arrest. Elface, a suspect in the brutal Hoopertown Cinemall slayings of two days ago, allegedly went berserk during the showing of a lower level film entitled KULTZ.

"KULTZ isn't always bad," said one young 'cinemaller.' "It's whatever's strongest in the audience. Last night we had a Linda Lovelace crowd, nobody got hurt. It was beautiful!"

Joe Mangelluckx, head of Mall Security, said, "Things have been quiet since that guy slipped a weapon past the checkpoint as part of his costume. Look, we've got enough trouble keeping the upper levels secure. These things are bound to happen. KULTZ gets 'em pretty worked up."

GUNNAR ELFACE

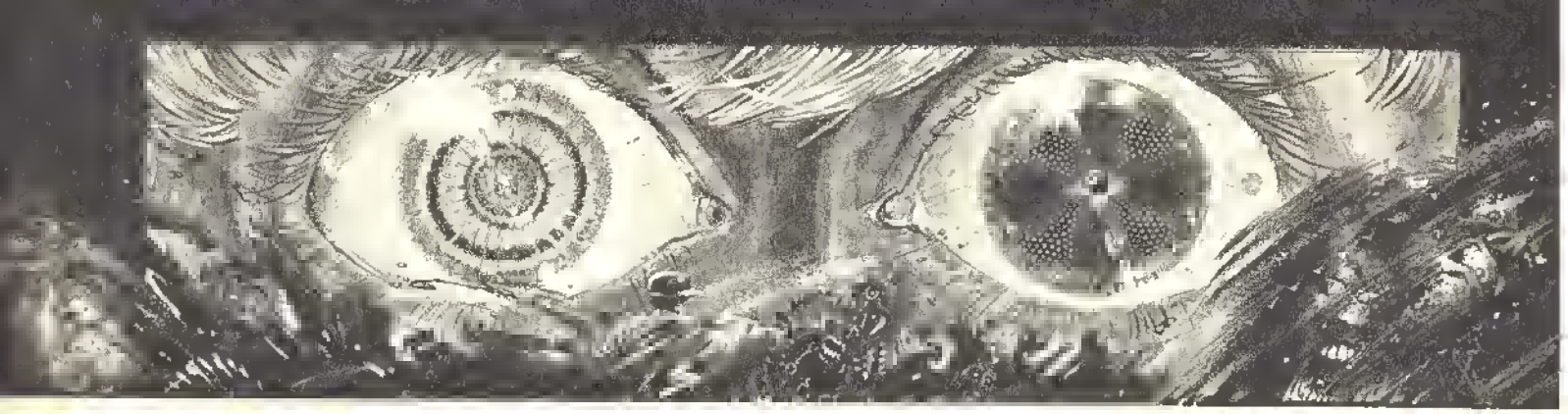
PISS OFF, RUSTBUCKET!
NO EXIT AFTER FILM BEGINS.
LIPS! LIPS!
NO EXIT
NO EXIT

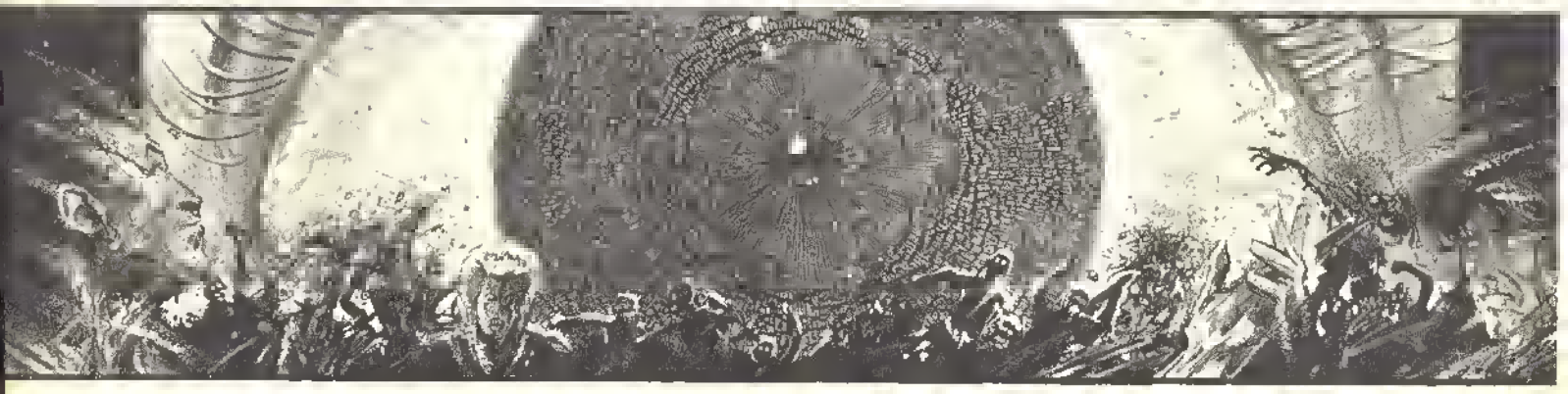
KA
KULTZ

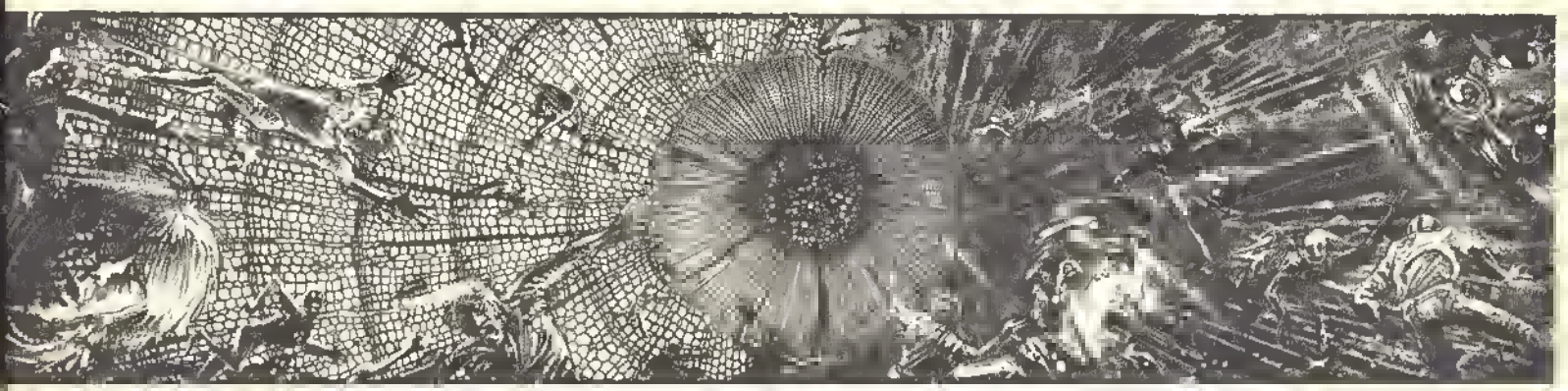
WHAT THE--
RIP! RIP!
I'M...
IT'S ALL BULLSHIT--

RIP! RIP! RIP!
...IN... THE...
...WRONG...
KREEEEEEEEEE

...THEATAR-RRRGH!
OHHH... NOOO... NOOO... L...LOO...
UGH... M-MY...
...LOSING IT...
...MY... FEET...

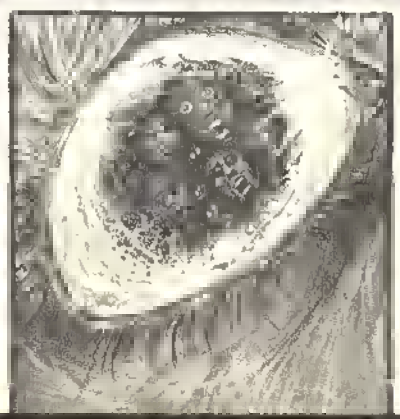




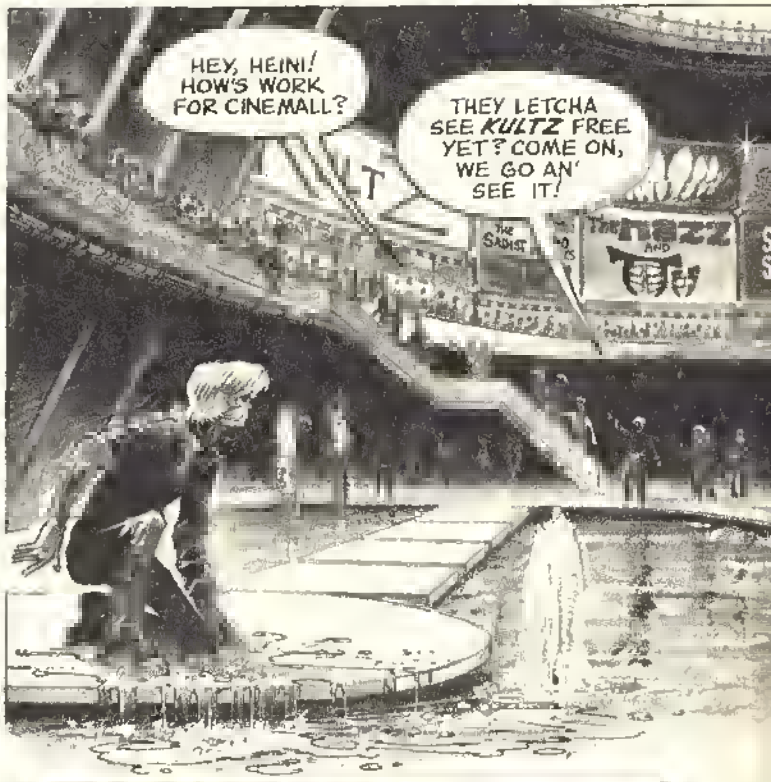


KA

THE END



EXIT
::: DO NOT ENTER



A CREW MAY LEAVE A SHIP BUT THEIR **STORIES** REMAIN BEHIND FOREVER. A GOOD STORY PENETRATES THE WHOLE SHIP AND EVERY PART OF IT, THE IRON, THE STEEL, THE PLASTIC, ALL THE HOLDS, THE SLAG BUNKERS, THE REACTOR HALLS, EVEN THE BILGE...

I AM THE **HUGO** AND THIS STORY HAS BEEN PART OF ME FOR QUITE A LONG TIME...

SHIPMATES

© BY RICK VEITCH 1981

LOOK AT ME **NOW**...

HULLS CAKED WITH RUST AND MY REACTORS LEAKING SO BADLY NOT A MAN-JACK IS ALLOWED BEHIND THE FO'CASTLE WITHOUT FULL RADIATION GEAR.

THE ENDLESS YEARS OF HAULING PURPLE SLAG ACROSS THE VOID HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL...

IT WON'T BE MANY MORE SUCH TRIPS 'FORE MY OWNERS WILL BE SCUTTLIN' ME FOR THE INSURANCE, NO DOUBT...

BUT ONCE I BOASTED THE LATEST IN INTERSTELLAR TECHNOLOGY, CARRYING ENOUGH ADVANCE WEAPONRY TO PROJECT TERRAN POWER ANYWHERE IN THE GALAXY.

SO, WHEN THE ***CALIGULAN SYSTEM*** REBELLED AGAINST THE EMPIRE, I WAS LOFTED TO EXACT ***RETRIBUTION!***

MY FIRST SKIPPER WAS ***CAPTAIN LYE***, THE ***PERFECT*** CHOICE FOR THE JOB AT HAND...

FROM MY GLEAMING BRIDGE HE SPAT OUT HIS ORDERS--

THAT'S THE ***LAST*** OF THEIR FLIMSY BATTLE STATIONS! LET'S ***COOK*** 'EM!

PREPARE SHIP'S CYB'RG!

1981 Rick Veitch

NOW, NOT EVERY INCH OF ME WAS SPIT'N'POLISH AND THE PRIDE OF THE TERRAN FLEET, DEEP IN MY DARKEST HOLD, IN A PIT SO FILTHY EVEN RATS AVOIDED IT, QUAZZ, THE SHIP'S CYB'RG, LAY IN CHAINS...
AHH, SHUT YER BLOODY SWEAR-HOLE!
AUNGH!
AAIIEEUNGH!
HIDEOUSLY DEFORMED, QUAZZ HAD SPENT MOST OF HIS EXISTENCE WIRED INTO ME LIKE SOME GHASTLY PATHETIC FETUS...
FOR WHEN THIS TWISTED WRETCH'S PSYCHE WAS LINKED UP WITH MY BANKS OF GLISTENING COMPUTERS...
CYB'RG AWAY!
AUNGH!
EEUNGH
QUAZZ
THERE STOOD CREATED THE MOST APPALLING WEAPON IN THE UNIVERSE: A CYB'RG!
THERE IS NO DEFENSE AGAINST SUCH A WEAPON.
WITH THE TOUCH OF HIS HAND, A CYB'RG CAN INCANDESCE THE ATMOSPHERIC ENVELOPE OF AN ENTIRE PLANET...
REDUCING ALL LIFE UPON IT TO CARBON...
AFTER EACH SUCH 'VICTORY,' CAPTAIN LYE WOULD GET THE MEDALS...
WHIINNE
WHILE QUAZZ WAS LEFT TO LICK HIS PSYCHIC WOUNDS AS BEST HE COULD...

NEARLY A YEAR WE SPENT ON SUCH DUTY; CUTTING A WIDE GASH IN THE HEART OF THE REBELLION...
THERE WERE NO TEARS RUNNING DOWN CAPTAIN LYE'S CHEEKS AS HE CROAKED THAT HELLISH ORDER!
I WANT TO SEE THOSE OCEANS BOIL!
ACTIVATE SHIP'S CYB'RG!
MY COMPUTERS ONCE AGAIN DRILLED INTO THE MIND OF THE INNOCENT QUAZZ...
...AND THE LATENT FORCE IN HIS UNCONSCIOUS MATERIALIZED ABOVE THE HELPLESS PLANET.
STOP!
I BEG YOU!
PLEASE! DO NOT DESTROY MY WORLD!
IT REACHED OUT TO CARBONIZE SIX BILLION SOULS--
TILL WE CAME UPON A LITTLE PLANET OF SUCH EXQUISITE BEAUTY IT BROUGHT HOMESICK TEARS TO THE EYES OF HALF THE CREW...

I AM ESMEREL.
THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD HAVE CREATED ME TO BE YOUR... MATE!
COME TO ME...
I CAN SET YOU FREE.
EEEUNGH?
THIS IS MUTINY!
TERMINATE THAT CYB'RG!

THE LAST THING MY COMPUTERS DULY NOTED WAS THAT THE CYB'RG COULD NOT BE TERMINATED...
THE ACT OF COUPLING WITH HIS MATE HAD EVOLVED HIM BEYOND HIS NEED FOR POWER FROM ME...
HE WAS NOW FREE TO ACT AS HE SAW FIT.
QUAZZ DIED WITH THE REST, HIS MORTAL FORM UNNECESSARY TO THE CYB'RG.
A NEW STORY WAS BEGINNING.
WHEN I WAS FOUND, THEY STRIPPED ME OF EVERYTHING INCLUDING MY PRIDE...
AND I WAS REFITTED AS A SLAG-MULE...
GONE ARE THE GLISTENING BANKS OF COMPUTERS...
...GONE THE LASERS...
...THE FIGHTERS...
YOU SEE, THERE'S NO NEED FOR WARSHIPS SINCE THE CYB'RGS AND THEIR CHILDREN TOOK OVER...
...AND NOT MUCH LEFT FOR A SHIP LIKE ME 'CEPT MY RUST AND MY SLAG...
...AND MY STORIES